The Devil's Hat
Melville Philips

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THE DEVIL'S HAT.

THE DEVIL'S HAT

A Sketch in Oil

BY

MELVILLE PHILIPS

BOSTON
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A WORD TO THE CRITIC.

Il est aisé de critiquer un auteur, mais il est difficile de l'apprécier. — *Vauvenargues.*

I SWEAR to you I can no longer contain myself. Sensible as I am of the humorous side of this undertaking, I nevertheless find encouragement to begin it in the reflection that almost everybody writes for publication in these days. Yet I am smiling now at my own assurance. I seem so unlike myself doing this thing — so self-complacent. I ask myself: — Would you actually venture, with your indifferent voice, to sing before an audience of musical critics? How, then, can you — perhaps the worst story-teller in the world — presume to face the public in such a rôle?

But I trust you will understand me. I have not the *cacoethes scribendi;* I have all the money and leisure I want; and I have become persuaded

that if much of the current literature deserves your perusal, then these true experiences of my life, that I am about to unfold to you, may not be unworthy of publication.

To be sure, much, if not all, depends upon the manner in which a story is told. I am not unmindful of this — of art — but then I do not profess equality with those professional writers, who, I sometimes fancy, attain from long practice with the pen to such a degree of dexterity in its use that they handle it as surely and gracefully as they do their forks. Indeed it is interesting to note the intimate relations which exist between the two instruments.

It's the beginning that perplexes me. I know very well that if I had the true dramatic talent I would start somewhere about the centre of events and evolve my story both ways. But I cannot; and here, at the threshold of what I have to say, I stand confounded and irresolute, like an errant boy late for school, with his trembling fingers clutching the knob of the school-house door; and as the awful admonitory tones of the

master within, rising distinctly above the confusion of youthful voices, present to his perturbed mind a vague picture of the interior, with the sickly, seedy form of the stern pedagogue prominent in the foreground, ruler in hand — so before my own eyes flash scenes and situations which must be depicted, and in my ears are ringing voices which shall be heard; and among the faces I see is *hers*, the centre of all, caged within a miniature derrick, and looking up at me from bended knees with the tearful expression of a sorrowing mother. And high above all the sounds I hear is that of *his* clear, sweet whistle — wonderful music, beguiling me now as it did then, until with burning blood and hard-clenched fists I pray my God for the power to pluck from my memory all remembrance of it.

So I tell you my story in the hope that the disclosure may lift this cloud from before me, may still this ever-recurring discord in the music of my thoughts, may banish forever all memory of the only man, as Heaven is my judge, whom I could never forget or forgive. And yet, I fear I shall

die despising him. Perhaps you laugh, and say, "Countless people — yes, one half the world hates the other half." Your experience may have taught you that men and women hate as they love — cordially but ephemerally, and very few indeed suffer any remorse. But remember, however, that it was my misfortune, if you please, to have been born with very much more heart than head.

And now, like the truant boy at the schoolhouse door, I will stop toying nervously with the latch, and open wide the door of this heart, that you may see its secrets.

THE DEVIL'S HAT.

CHAPTER I.

Dear as remembered kisses after death,
. . . and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more.
— *Tennyson.*

I SHOULD tell you in the first place that I am a lawyer, and since you are not at all likely to meet me in the capacity of a client, I don't mind telling you also that I think the world was quite right in its unflattering judgment of my professional skill. I am a poor advocate — poor as to merit, I mean, not money. I slowly came to an appreciation of this fact shortly after I was cast upon my own resources by the death of my uncle — my benefactor, who had one of the kindest hearts that ever beat within a human breast. Himself a bachelor, he had taken me, an orphan lad, and lavished upon me all the tenderness of his gentle nature. He petted me, anticipated and gratified my every whim, and, alas! was only too glad to exhibit his

idolatry on every occasion. I express regret for this now because I fear — indeed, I know — that, like many other worse lads than myself, I did not appreciate the matchless love conferred upon me; I came, in time, to regard it as my just due, and each one of his generous and constant proofs of affection but deadened my capacity for gratitude, and enhanced my unnatural estimate of my own importance. Boyish thoughtlessness, say you? Yes, but I shudder thinking of it, and redden with shame recalling my complacent regard of his unselfish and slavish worship of me.

It is needless now to dwell upon those days of bitter regret — of burning remorse. Let me simply caution you, boy, whoever you are — be less heedless of the affection squandered upon you; be devoutly grateful for every loving kiss your mother gives you; for the time shall quickly come when your eyes will be open to their priceless value, when you would gladly yield up your life for one such again — your soul for the chance to rain down sobbing kisses on the quivering lips that are no more.

It was only when I saw him all cold and white in his coffin that the sharp pangs of remorse seized hold of me. In a sudden rush of memory,

I seemed to see all the smiles he had ever showered upon me, to hear again all his countless expressions of loving admiration and sympathy, and, almost palsied with the poignant sense of my ingratitude, I fixed my hot eyes on the calm ashen face before me. "O, uncle! uncle!" I cried, bathing his dear dead face with my tears; "only live again and let me prove my love!"

. . . . .

They handed me this letter that he had written a week before his death: —

"My dear boy," it read, "forgive me if you can. I had fondly hoped to see you again, but I cannot bear to do so now. The great desire of my later life has been to leave you, if not a fortune, at least a sum of money sufficient to insure you a comfortable living. But now, when I had almost succeeded, I have failed. In my foolish haste to win this fortune for you, I risked too largely, and lost. No matter about the details. But I am broken-hearted, my boy; I feel as if I had robbed you — you, whom I love more than all else on earth or in Heaven beside.

"My old attorney will deliver to you ten thousand dollars — it is all I could save from the wreck. May God forgive me! but I shall die with-

out forgiving myself. Oh! how I long to see you — to hear you laugh and talk in the old familiar way. It makes me dizzy, my boy, to think of such happiness. — But I know you will pity my weakness, and not blame me much when I am dead — and oh! my darling Jack, let me die believing that you will come when my eyes are closed, and will bend over my coffin, and kiss me full upon the lips and say, 'I forgive you.'"

God! the agony I suffered reading this.

CHAPTER II.

Meph. — But what profession is your choice?
Stu. — Law shall not ever have my voice.
Meph. — In this, I own, you show discerning:
I know, and do not love, this learning.
— *Goethe's Faust.*

So it came that at dusk of a summer day I was strolling among the straggling houses of the marvellous mushroom town of Sandhole. Here I had been for some weeks seeking an opportunity to make my fortune. I had not come to ply my profession, for I well knew the fugacious nature of these settlements.

A prospector, "wildcatting" in the depths of the woods, "strikes oil," and in a few days a wondrous life and light burst out in the black silence of the forest. The sun shines on clearings where before a chance ray has not penetrated for half a century. Countless derricks and round red oil-tanks spring up like monster fungi; and presently, ushered by the clinking of drills and wheezing of engines, arrive the regular and essential constituents of an oil-town population.

Come the speculators, scouts, landlords, and venders of backwoods necessaries. Then, for a time, the life of the place proceeds swiftly and at high pressure. Saloons, theatres, and churches appear and flourish harmoniously together; but alas! the *delenda est* hurled at Carthage is applicable to every oil-town. The supply of petroleum ebbs, and proportionately to the number of wells sunk in the oil-yielding sand. Then, as the production diminishes, and many fortunes are lost and few won, the unstable community slowly takes flight; the larger hotels close; the theatres and churches are demolished for their lumber; the taverns are removed to freshly discovered fields; a few bankrupt and broken-hearted speculators linger for a while at their "dusters"; but soon the large-eyed owls hoot in entire solitude from the top of the gaunt derricks, while the wind whistles a requiem through the blackened branches of the trees.

The petroleum excitement was at its height; the rage for money-making had taken possession of the soberest minds; husbands encouraged their wives to buy "on margin" with their pin-money; more than one clergyman had dropped his profession to go on 'change at Oil City or Titusville;

railroad conductors chatted glibly and incessantly of "flyers" and "certificates"; — and where, then, more likely than to Sandhole, whence issued the most wonderful stories of riches gotten in a day, should an orphan youth of lively imagination drift to seek his fortune? Not since my arrival had I felt so strongly the contagion of the oil-fever as I did on this quiet summer evening.

A few days before, I had identified among the stream of fresh arrivals at the "Bullwheel" Hotel, an old acquaintance and former fellow-student-at-law, Joyce Selden. I was really delighted to see him, and he returned my greeting with a warmth that surprised and gratified me. For we had not been close associates while students, since our tastes were widely divergent. In those days, Selden was too sober and studious for me. If he ever indulged in any of the follies of youth, innocent or otherwise, I was never informed of the fact; and hence it was that we who devoted but a tithe of our time to Kent, Williams, and the Reports were wont to look upon him as an interloper.

The eminent lawyer in whose office we studied rather encouraged us in our idle habits. He had

graduated a generation of youthful attorneys, and exacted from all but one condition of behavior, that of a mild kind of adulation of himself. He was quite famous — more, perhaps, as an orator and conversationalist than as an advocate; and it then seemed very proper that we should prostrate ourselves mentally before him. Of medium height and compact build, he was cursed with the most sinister countenance I ever beheld; and it was whispered in the office that so despondent had he once become because of this misfortune, he had resolved while abroad to retire into a monastery; but a certain titled lady was keen enough to discern the genius that was slumbering for want of stimulation, and, partly, as she afterwards claimed, from motives of pure charity, married him. His fame and fortune were so firmly secured to him at the time of my novitiate in his office, that he took his ease, indeed, albeit his practice was very extensive, larger, I think, than that of any other attorney in the Quaker City — a most astonishing community, which started proudly forth in its career, settling disputes, as became Friends and brotherly lovers, by arbitration, and has now arrived at such a pass that its citizens

have need of two thousand lawyers to fleece them while they are bickering.

This *otium cum dignitate* he managed by means of a dual method, not entirely original with himself: namely, of delegating, in the first place, to his students (for the benefit of research and practice) the task of preparing all the briefs; and, secondly, by a systematic postponement of issue, with a view to the final compromise of suits — which plan had this admirable quality in it, of expanding fees. Thus nothing more was necessary than that the Hon. Hewson Dilster, LL. D., should exhibit his influential and eloquent presence in the courts as the cases came up for argument. His word had such weight with all the judges that, if he so desired it, the merest symptom of a cold on his part was quite sufficient reason, in their judgment, for the postponement of a hearing; while I once heard poor old Mortmane plead vainly in a husky whisper for one week's delay, until his doctor could stamp out the seeds of pneumonia that were in him.

It was the Honorable Hewson's custom to single out from each fresh batch of students the one who exhibited the surest signs of docility,

assiduity, and poverty. Him he exempted from the payment of a tuition fee, and even subsidized; making him his private secretary, confidential clerk, office valet, and scapegoat — from whom he exacted miscellaneous service, from the tying of a cravat to the cabling of his London tailor. And this was the bill that Joyce Selden had filled when we were cast together as students-at-law in the office of Hewson Dilster.

Notwithstanding our quondam relations, we now met cordially in Sandhole. I was surprised at the great change in his bearing and appearance. He was neatly, even fashionably dressed, and, instead of the brow knitted with premature care, that used to deform his really handsome face, I now confronted a gentleman of smooth skin, mobile features, and most engaging manners. At first, still possessed of my old feeling of superiority towards him, I confess I had set out to patronize him; but, with faultless tact, he had, by imperceptible degrees, completely turned the tables upon me, and, at the end of our first interview, I found myself asking his advice, praising the shrewdness of the plans he suggested, and inwardly admiring the charm of his address.

And on this evening, as we wended our tortuous way from the "Bullwheel" towards the edge of the town, past the noisy weatherboard saloons and gambling dens, I could not help glancing furtively at his calm dark face, and wondering at the strange mutations of time. We had nothing to gossip about, no news of the adventures of common friends to retail, for our social habits, as I have said, had formerly led us into different paths. Indeed, it was astonishing to me that he could look so well and self-possessed in his good clothes. Our only allusion to past times was the simple intelligence, which he rather gingerly vouchsafed me when we first met, that he had broken loose from the Hon. Hewson Dilster. He was also come to Sandhole upon the same errand as myself; but I soon discovered there was decidedly more method in the madness of his Argonautic trip than in mine. He was fully informed upon all the preposterous superstitions of the "wildcatters"; he smoothly, and with no offensive obtrusion of manner, acquainted me with the two geological theories which pretended to account for the deposits of oil; he was thoroughly conversant with the details and business of sinking wells, and had

figured, he modestly said, with no little success on the 'changes of the neighboring oil-centres. He spoke quite confidentially, but all the time he had only half my attention, for the night was so glorious, the stars so bright, and the life around me so strange.

"And now, Ogden," he said, after a silence of some minutes, while we retraced our steps through the noisy and irregular thoroughfares, "you have some money, you say, and are here to invest it advantageously. How much have you?"

"Nearly eight thousand."

"Not a great deal, to be sure. Of itself, a very insufficient sum to enable you to compete in this place with men who trifle with ten — twenty — fifty times that amount; and who have, besides, that invaluable capital, experience."

I hastened to assure him that when I came to Sandhole I had no idea of competing with these astute and wealthy gentlemen. I simply came to look about me, and had not been at all certain that I should be able to make a profitable venture with my scanty capital. Indeed, I now felt, marking the great number of ruined

investers on every hand, that if I departed without risking my money at all, I might prove, in the end, to have been not a little lucky and wise.

At this he began whistling in a low tone; — and I feel guilty, remembering that I have done him the injustice of not mentioning this talent. He whistled like no one else, with his lips slightly apart, as though he were singing; and the notes fell soft, clear, and sweet as a bird's — so like a flute, yet imbued with the tender, sympathetic undertone of the human voice. We used to think it the only accomplishment he had, and I have no doubt that it was this which first attracted Dilster towards him. Certain it is that I had more than once observed the old diplomat leaning back in his easy-chair, with half-closed eyes, listening enrapt, like the rest of us, while Selden, lost in his work, and all unconscious of his delighted audience, whistled some bewitching melody. I was often tempted to outrage the decorum of the office by bursting into applause; and once, I recall, after Selden had rendered Schubert's "Serenade" with unusual sweetness, Dilster himself did not attempt to conceal his delight, but, sitting bolt-upright in

his chair, and rubbing his rheumy eyes, called out: —

"Bravo! Selden, you're an ass. Let law go to, sir. Why should you grind along like this, when you can whistle your way through the world on flowery beds of ease? You can, by Jove, sir."

And this much I do know, that, after each one of Selden's musical efforts, I mentally voted him a good fellow, and regularly determined to cultivate his friendship. But, following the notice taken of his talent by Dilster, Joyce withdrew, if possible, more closely to himself; he whistled but rarely, seeming to control his impulse to do so with considerable discomfort to himself.

But I have wandered sadly away from Sandhole, seeing I only meant to say that after I had disclaimed any settled intention of speculating in oil, Selden had simply begun to whistle softly that divine air from "Martha" — "*Ah! che a voi.*"

We had now almost reached the "Bullwheel"; and the jarring noises of the town, its laughter, profanity, and ribald song were here blended into one discordant hum, and the atmosphere was heavy with the pungent odor of petroleum. Suddenly Selden ceased whistling, and, grasping me by the hand, said: —

"Pardon me, Ogden, but you seem different from what you were at Dilster's. You seem to have coolness and sound judgment. You have certainly managed to keep your head, among all this mania for speculation; — which I regard as very remarkable, considering how contagious frenzy is. Now, I believe I can put you in the way of multiplying many times the amount of money you say you have. If you care to know how, come with me to my room."

CHAPTER III.

For Fortune is a woman, and must be hectored to keep her under, and it is visible every day she suffers herself to be managed by those who are brisk and audacious.

— MACHIAVELLI'S *Prince.*

THE rough weatherboard hotel was crowded with guests. Outside, there were groups of scouts and flashily dressed speculators — some seated smoking in arm-chairs in the middle of the street, others erect and conversing in whispers. In the open space before the hotel, two iron tubes had been driven into the earth to tap the natural gas, and out of these there poured, night and day, two roaring sheets of flame, whose scarlet glow, blending with that of many others scattered about the town, gave the place the appearance of a vast conflagration.

I halted upon the threshold for an instant, and, glancing over my shoulder, caught such a vivid impression of the unique scene that it can never depart my memory. The clear blue-and-black sky, sparkling with little suns, ended abruptly high above me where the hill kissed it. Here and

there sporadic groups of swaying pines bent in and out of the scarlet glow, which lay all around with lurid effect upon the hillside, bathing in blood-tint the skeleton derricks, whose fantastic arms swung up and down with a petulant creaking. Everywhere, on hill-top and far off in the valley, where the natural gas had been coaxed to the surface by piping, or had found a fortuitous exit, burned the great bale-fires with the noise of rushing waters. The clinking of glasses; the screeching of dissonant violins; the boisterous laughter of maudlin oil-men; the crude cabin outlines, lighted from within as well as without; the groups of talkers in weird silhouette, — all these sounds and shapes were mingled confusedly in the impression I caught from my single backward glance.

"How was she spouting when you left her, Dick?" a voice called from the piazza, as Selden and I passed through the bar-room.

Selden paused on the other side of the partition, and listened attentively.

"S't you, Bill? at a spanking rate. Easily fifteen hundred," — came the answer, delivered in a careless tone by a blue-shirted scout at the bar.

I saw a smile on my companion's face when we

gained his room, and the glare of the gas fell upon him. A gas stove, fixed in the centre of the cramped apartment served also as a lamp.

"Sit on the bed, Ogden," said he, in a quick, alert way. "I will soon let you into my scheme. In the first place, are you at all acquainted with the methods of wildcatting?"

"I only know what any superficial observer in these regions would be likely to learn in a few days; what a 'duster' is, for instance; a 'sand-pump,' and a 'bull-wheel.' But, I know nothing of the mysteries of 'change —"

"It isn't essential that you should. As for a thorough knowledge of the processes incident to the production of petroleum, you can have it in a day. A derrick, with drilling apparatus, is erected on the spot where the well is to be sunk, with out-houses for the protection of machinery; 'tubing' and 'casing' are introduced as fast as the hole is bored, and when the oil-bearing sand is reached an oil-pump is inserted in the place of the sand-pump; the amber liquid flows into tanks, where it is gauged, and occasionally charges of nitro-glycerine are exploded in the well to stimulate the flow. If no petroleum is found in the well, it is a *duster* — and if the

unfortunate gentleman engaged in the enterprise has sunk many such, and speculated heavily on the strength of them, he is a ruined man. This, in a nutshell, is all there is to it."

He spoke slowly, distinctly, confidently. Pausing while he lighted a cigar, he resumed in the same tone: —

"I think it augurs well that we can take note of the many failures here with the same coolness and interest that we do of the marvellous successes. We are not handicapped by over-confidence or enthusiasm. Speaking from a purely business standpoint, I believe that, in estimating our capacities for engaging in this speculative life, we may fairly count upon an unusual degree of level-headedness and worldly wisdom. If those men shouting out there on the street can turn their wits to such golden account, why not we, with our trained tact and legal sagacity. I know very well that mere learning does not of itself qualify a man to compete with these self-reliant 'wildcatters'; but I am convinced that the educated professional men, who are now swarming here, will eventually control in all the operations of these regions. Already, you observe, many of the scouts and ordinary labor-

ers are the brightest fellows here; — some of them college graduates and clerks from the cities. But we have had the advantage of training in a profession which, of all others, is best calculated to develop those traits which will be of most value to us here. I think, in other words, that we know how to deal with, and, if needs be, to influence men."

"Bravo!" said I. "You have proved me to be a greater man than I suspected. We are then a pair of Rodins, are we?"

"Now, Ogden, see here; don't laugh. I am no visionary, as you ought to know. I am simply estimating our fitness for a certain enterprise. But I'll stop vaporing, if you don't like it, and go to the heart of the scheme at once.

"I have been a diligent observer in the oil-country, studied carefully its geological features, and, through a series of sound premises, have finally arrived at the conclusion that petroleum is a substance kindred to coal in its formation and deposit. This is the theory of those geologists who have thoroughly investigated the subject. But I have also come to believe that the oil-yielding sand-rock has been naturally

deposited across this region — perhaps across the continent — at an angle of about forty-five degrees south-west and north-east.

"Now, granting the correctness, or, at least, the plausibility, of my hypothesis, it is evident that the production at Sandhole has reached its high tide. For a week past there has been a steady ebb in the yield; most of the wells recently sunk have proved 'dusters'; work on those at present drilling has been eased — indeed, by some entirely suspended; the market is rising; and — the surest indication of all that there is a growing belief in the approaching limit of the production of this centre — land on the outskirts can be procured for a mere song. — A word more, and you have my plan. Did you overhear what that scout in the bar-room said to his friend as we passed through? It was in reference to the flow of the new well, '423,' just sunk a little to the right of Gas Hollow. He said it was gushing 'at a spankin' rate.' I expected it — I knew it; — it is in accordance with my theory, and had to occur. From the location of '423' to the base of 'The Devil's Hat' hill — a full mile and a half — all the land has been taken and worked. But the hill itself

remains in a state of nature. The poor fools call it a 'mountain-spur,' and rightly believe it impossible to strike oil on a mountain, because of the volcanic disturbance of the strata. So they have all given it the cold shoulder. But the truth is that it lies exactly in the way of my imaginary line of prolific oil-rock; and I know it to be only a harmless elevation — an isolated table-land — a rock-cap, covering perhaps the richest deposit of petroleum in this region. Moreover, I have as much as persuaded its present owner, a man by the name of Garrow, to part with it to me for a trifling sum, as the alleged site for a summer hotel. He is interested in the proposed railroad, and has a fine idea of making Sandhole a permanent and wealthy settlement, doubtless for political reasons. Now, will you risk $5000 to make a fortune? With double that sum we can purchase the Devil's Hat, make believe to clear it for the erection of a handsome hotel, and, meanwhile, be really sinking our 'Mystery' well.

"I have already a friend — a battered old scout — who will secure us several trustworthy laborers, and secretly introduce the drilling machinery, piece by piece. This is the rough outline.

Now, what say you? Can you trust me? — will you join me?"

He did not betray the least excitement of manner or tone, but sat perfectly still in his chair, with one limb over the other, and his body bent slightly forward. Yet there was an earnest confidence in his voice that aroused my enthusiasm. I believed in him and his scheme, and felt, when he had ended and made his appeal to me, so much indebted to him for the opportunity he offered, that I sprang from the bed, and, grasping his outstretched hand, said, with honest gratitude: —

"Selden, I place implicit confidence in you. Let's 'lump' our money, and work the Devil's Hat together." He wrung my hand, and we were partners.

CHAPTER IV.

HOST. — . . . Am I politic? am I subtle? am I a Machiavel?
— *The Merry Wives of Windsor, Act 3, Scene 1.*

THE Devil's Hat arose abruptly, like a great wart, from the high plain in the rear of Sandhole. It was perhaps more than a mile in circumference, and would average a height of two hundred feet. Around its entire face, at irregular distances and elevations, were weather-worn fissures and hollows, which gave it, on rainy days, a grotesquely battered look, and rendered it, likewise, very difficult of ascent. Indeed, there were but two easy approaches — a wagon-road by the southern side, and a narrow path leading comfortably up the slope from the west. On the well wooded top, several hundred yards back of the exposed level spot which we had selected as the site of our proposed hotel, there was a deep, wide ravine, known as the "Pit." Near the surface, a spring gushed from out the black rocks, and splashed noisily down in cascades to the bottom, where

it disappeared in the earth with a rush and a whirl, bounding forth again into the light as a little brook, somewhere over in the woods below. And it was in this "Pit" that we decided to sink our "Mystery" well.

For a fortnight we had diligently prosecuted the deception of building the hotel; digging its foundations and hauling lumber from the neighboring mills. The editor of the Sandhole *Spouter*, having carefully inspected our plans, published a flattering description of the coming hostlery, that was designed at once to embellish and perpetuate the settlement. At first, there was constantly a band of idlers at hand to watch and discuss our operations; but their interest, presently, flagged; it was a long walk from Sandhole, and after the first week we were left alone with our workmen. These we then gradually dismissed, replacing them with competent oil-men, forwarded to us from Oil City, by Bedford, our confidential broker. Through him also we had purchased our engine and drill, and, without arousing the least suspicion, had received them, boxed carefully in parts, by a circuitous route, and labelled as machinery for use in the hotel. Then, labor-

ing only at night, our men had erected the derrick in the Pit, and housed the engine; and soon we could detect at the hotel — where, to guard against the vigilance of the scouts, we maintained an appearance of building — the pant of the engine and the muffled click of the drill. Directly above the derrick, we threw across the mouth of the Pit a rough platform of logs and brushwood, which served at the same time as a bridge, and a screen against the gaze of inquisitive strangers. The temporary shanties in which we lived were built about the lower end of the opening, so that the chance observer would attribute to them the thin columns of smoke and steam which might really issue upwards at times from the engine-house. It was natural for us to locate near the only convenient water-supply; and, besides, we sank pipes in the ground to capture the natural gas, and at night the Devil's Hat was thus illuminated with such a weird effect that we ourselves became presently persuaded that it was in truth a very picturesque situation for a hotel. The circle of spouting gas-jets around the mouth of the Pit was especially striking; and I used to wander at night

down to the clearing, and, stretching myself out on the cool grass, watch the phantom figures high above, on the edge of the vast black mound, move about and sway in the glow of the flame. Dante himself would surely have regarded this as a choice entrance to the Bottomless Pit.

We were constantly on the lookout for interlopers, particularly the oil-scouts, whose keen ears, we knew, could detect afar off, not only the clinking sound of the drill, but even the throbbing flow of the oil itself, computing to a barrel, as they lay listening on the ground, the daily yield of a well. But we were rarely disturbed, and never caught napping; for we had so disciplined our men that, when an alarm was given, the belt would be instantly released from the fly-wheel in the engine-house, the drill checked, and, while everything became suddenly silent in the Pit, our laborers at the hotel hammered and sawed as though possessed.

Thus a month had almost passed away without noteworthy incident. I had not confined my attention strictly to the Devil's Hat; I roamed over all the surrounding country. No one could honestly call the oil-regions picturesque; it is

nothing but woods, woods — much of these scrubby and mean — but pine-woods, nevertheless, with here and there a clearing. And through them I took long walks, finding my way by blazed paths, or by following the lines of clicking oil-pipes, which wriggled stiffly over the land, like endless black serpents. And always there was a subtle garlicky odor in the air.

You might come from one of the chief oil-centres, take the narrow-gauge car at the Junction, and go creaking and jolting at a snail's pace through the primeval forest, where only a year before the sportsman had come for the best deer. You would not be in harmony with your environment. Say it is mid-day: yet only a twilight pierces the thick gloom; branches of pines and hemlocks arch the rough road-bed over which your crazy little train crawls and puffs. All along, huge monarchs of the forest lie prostrate where pigmies with their saws and axes cut them down. Now and then, among the choicest timber, a wide clearing bursts into view, with a saw-mill in the centre, half enveloped in steam; and suddenly a strange odor is wafted in at the chinks of your window. Then the train, leaving a tangent, swings round a sharp curve, and introduces you

to a curious spectacle — the yellowish ground threaded with lines of iron pipe, and dotted here and there with iron tanks, of various size but invariable coat of red paint, while high up on the hill, and all about, you see the skeleton derricks, with their cumbrous walking-beams, that move slowly up and down.

Then, in the town itself, at the "Bullwheel" hotel — where, when the light and life first burst into the region, and the black solitude of the forest gave way to the blows of the axe, the rattle of machinery, and the roar of the torpedo, you might gladly have paid the price of a suit of clothes for the privilege of catching cold and no sleep, on a mouldy mattress in the cellar — there you will see your fellow-man, in such multiform guises and degrees of mania as you had never dreamed of his assuming. See the broker and "wildcatter," gorgeous of raiment, and mostly profane; the crafty scout, young, intelligent, jolly, but reserved of mien; the calm and wary contractor; the driller, in blue overalls, and blackened of hands and face; the dare-devil torpedoer, blue-shirted, his trousers booted, his hat awry, and his breath redolent of fire-water, — all of these harmoniously commingled.

And at night you can stand at your window, and, looking out beyond the roaring gas and the restless shapes in the glare of it, over the tops of the saloons and churches, which flourish here together, out upon the grim derricks, standing like great dunce-caps, or, better still, like giant sentinels, on the slope of the hill, gesturing monotonously with their ponderous arms, — you may meditate upon the scene, and perhaps see in it all a steady obedience to the divine *fiat* uttered in Eden; for the magic drills tap the rich reservoirs, and, lo! there is light. Yet, to arrive at an adequate understanding of the life around you, stay there, or come again — come when the feverish pulse of the place is beating feebly; like that, for instance, of the oil-town a few miles to the north. It bears the name of an honored chief magistrate, taken when he was in the high tide of his manhood. You might go now, and see the few citizens that stick to it, playing base-ball at sunset in the grass-grown main street. And *its* pulse was fluttering wildly when approaching dissolution rattled in the throat of its more illustrious human namesake.

But Sandhole was still a "centre"; still productive and prosperous; only many radii had

been drawn from it as a "centre," by the sinking of wells, which defined the area of prolific oil-ground; and production was not on the increase, — if anything, on the decline. In my occasional walks to the town, I could see, or fancied I could, increasing signs of melancholy on the faces of the oil-men. I seldom spoke of this to Joyce; indeed, I felt as though I had no right to speak of it. I had ventured my little all on an experiment, but I was not deeply concerned about the result; yet with Joyce it seemed different. He was so devoted to the enterprise that I feared, if our well should prove a "duster," the failure would kill him. He did not care to talk, save upon this subject, always uppermost in his mind. More than once I tried to interest him in reminiscences of our student-life. He would listen with an impatient smile, and quickly twist the conversation back to oil. He whistled but rarely. I was sorry for this, and so, I saw, were the men.

One morning, on a sudden cessation of work in the Pit, I stepped to the door of my cabin, and was surprised to see Joyce approaching me, accompanied by a medium-sized man, of docile look, lithe figure, and uncertain age, for his hair was cropped close, and his bronzed face shaved clean.

He was clad simply in a large soft hat, blue shirt, and linen trousers stuffed into capacious boots.

"I've been showing Mr. — ah — "

"Tickly-Bender 'll do," prompted the blue-shirted man.

"Mr. Tickly-Bender — our work at the hotel," said Joyce. "Major Dibbs, of the *Spouter*, has kindly sent him here to sell us several tickets to a ball, given for the benefit of — ah — " he paused again, to consult one of the cards he held in his hand, but Tickly-Bender came once more to his assistance.

"Of *diseased* torpedoers," said he, in a mournful voice.

"Yes," Joyce continued, reading from one of the tickets, "'for the benefit of the families of deceased torpedoers; at Roughtown, on the evening of the 29th of July!' — That's to-day. Where is Roughtown?"

Tickly-Bender pondered an instant, and then stretched out his right arm towards the south. "There," said he, "right there."

"But how do the guests get there?"

"Wagons from the 'Bullwheel,' which 'll go at eight o'clock, *sharp*," he said, impressively; add-

ing, "The Major thought ye'd both want to come; everybody's a-goin' to be there."

"We're certainly obliged to both of you for thinking of us," Joyce responded, cordially; and Tickly-Bender looked as though he believed him. Then, in a moment or two, he awkwardly left us, greatly to our relief, and Joyce turned to me with a puzzled smile.

"I don't quite know what to think of it," he said. "Maybe, he tells the truth; the Major may have no ulterior object in view; but I think it would be well for one of us to go to the ball, so as to avoid talk — to see, too, if any suspicion of us already exists."

I not only agreed with him, but had felt all along that we were not mixing enough among these people. They might begin to suspect our exclusive devotion to the Devil's Hat. But it was plain that Joyce himself did not wish to attend this ball. I did; and, to relieve him, at once expressed my willingness to go.

"I wish you would," he said, eagerly.

So I left the Hat with abundance of time before me in which to reach the "Bullwheel" by the appointed hour. Long before I got within sight of the hotel, I could hear shouts coming

from that direction, the heart of the town. On the outskirts, an unusual silence prevailed; and when I, at length, turned into the main — which was, in fact, the only regular — thoroughfare, I saw the cause. All Sandhole was apparently assembled in front of the "Bullwheel," yelling and squirming about in the glare of the loud hissing gas. A line of nondescript vehicles stretched along the road, a few of them already occupied by cautious guests, who had made sure of their seats; but the great body of the passengers still lingered in the street, on the steps of the hotel, or — a large and influential section of them — in the bar-room; all objects of great interest to the major portion of Sandhole, that could not attend the ball.

I made my way with no little difficulty to the front of the "Bullwheel," and there paused, uncertain how to proceed. It was a motley crowd around me. The middle-aged man in creased buckram clothes, and "boiled" shirt without any collar, largely predominated; for, in the main, he was a driller, torpedoer, workman of some kind. But the scout was there, also, in good force, freshly shaven, but otherwise in dishabille, even to the wearing of no coat; for, like the wildcatter and

contractor, loud-voiced and flashily dressed, of whom there was a fair representation, the scout was plainly going to the ball as a superior personage on a lark. Of women, there were only a few, already seated in the coaches, and these were presumably some of the interested, if not interesting, families of the "diseased" torpedoers.

I felt a hand upon my arm, and, turning, gazed into the smooth, smiling face of a tall gentleman, garbed in broadcloth and a high silk hat, the prominent feature of whose face — aside from the smile which was always a part of it — being a robust aquiline nose, and by it, if nothing else, I should have recognized him as Major Dibbs, the editor of the Sandhole *Spouter*.

"Are you alone?" said he. "Where is your partner?"

I told him; and, drawing my arm through his, he made off through the crowd to one of the forward wagons in the line.

"Let us avoid the crush," said he; "it will soon be eight o'clock." When he spoke, the air was filled with circumstantial evidence of his having been in the bar-room of the "Bullwheel."

"But where are the women?" I asked. "It looks as though the ball were to be a stag-party."

"Bless you, no. This is only a single delegation. Unhappily, Sandhole is but ill supplied with ladies, yet Gory Run and Coveville have plenty of the creatures; Roughtown, too. The bucks will be there with their girls from twenty miles around. This way, Mr. Burns," he shouted to a young man in rough dress, whose face, as I saw it in the gas glare, looked strikingly frank and good-natured. A bevy of others, mostly gentlemen *with* collars, and splendid watch-chains, came running up at the same instant, and scrambled into our wagon, filling every seat.

"Gentlemen," said the Major, in a declamatory tone, "let me present you *en masse* to Mr. Ogden, of the Devil's Hat."

There was now a great commotion in front of the "Bullwheel," and all along the line. The crowd parted, and then thinned, as the wagons rapidly filled amid louder yells and laughter; and presently a man appeared on the porch of the hotel with a gong, and beat it savagely, with deafening effect. This, the Major informed me, indicated the fact that it was now eight o'clock, "sharp." Almost simultaneously the head wagons in the procession moved onward, their occupants rending the air with shouts and song, taken up

and swelled by those in the rear; and, as the whole line got into motion, the crowd of spectators in front of the hotel gave three ear-splitting cheers.

Thus we crept slowly and noisily out of the gas-light. Its reflection fell on the faces of my companions, and I saw that the Major wore the same placid, self-complacent smile. Once away from the nest of shanties, and when crawling up the hill among rocks and stumps, I could see the dingy outlines of the round tanks, with here and there the lambent reflection of the gas playing upon their sides; and everywhere arose the light pyramidal derricks, with stars to be seen through their grim, airy shapes. Higher up, when I gazed back and down upon Sandhole, it lay all ugly and silent, as if on fire where the countless gas-pipes delivered their turbulent streams of flame. Then, hanging a moment on the crest of the hill, we began rumbling rapidly, through clouds of dust, down into the darkness; pine woods stretching black and far away on either hand, and only a vague, occasional shout or snatch of song reaching our ears from the teams behind and ahead of us.

"What'll you say in the *Spouter* about it,

Major?" cried one of the gentlemen opposite, who wore the conspicuous watch-chain.

"About what?" asked the Major.

"The drop at '423.'"

"Oh!" said the Major, in a loud voice, "I'll say nothing. I tell you, gentlemen," he continued, leaning forward, with his hands on his hips, "it's nonsense to talk about a field giving out simply because there's a decline in the yield of one well in it, or because one man sinks a 'duster.' Sandhole's the richest centre in the oil-country, Gas Hollow, or no Gas Hollow, and the supply of oil here is practically inexhaustible."

There was a derisive snort up front, but the wagon rolled on through the dust for fully a minute before any one answered him. Then somebody called out in shrill tones: —

"Major, why don't you produce some yourself, if you think there's so much oil to be got?"

"Perhaps I will," said the Major; "wait and see — eh, Schlau?" this inquiry to the frank-faced young man he had introduced to me as Mr. Burns. "If I thought," he added, "that this drop at '423' was the beginning of the end of Sandhole, you don't suppose I'd buy fresh type for the *Spouter* — do you, Fox?"

"Can't tell what you'd do, Major, I'm sure," said the shrill voice, at which every one laughed.

"Well, here's a man has faith in the place — Mr. Ogden. If Sandhole goes, he'll have a fine large elephant on his hands; but it's my opinion that he and his partner have got a fortune in that hotel."

"You aren't gunnin' for ads. already, are you, Major?"

"No," he said, earnestly; "I'm speaking out my honest conviction. I believe Sandhole is to be a permanent settlement, and, consequently, that a good hotel, on a good location like the Devil's Hat, will prove a good thing."

"There's no use talkin', though," again observed the first speaker, *en face* of the Major; "this here 'fourth sand' may be full of 'gushers,' but it ain't got the *stay* to it that the 'chocolate' has."

The Major scouted the idea with a scornful laugh.

"Humbug!" said he. "This white sand is a kind of a sponge; it's the deepest and the best pocket of all."

From the profound silence with which this assertion was received, and the hilarity which

quickly followed its utterance, I gathered that these wildcatters were very grateful indeed to have the sanguine Major voice their hopes by expressing confidence in the security of their investments.

There ensued such an uproar in the wagon as can only be made by the boisterous oil-man — perhaps, by any assemblage of grown men determined to be boys again. We ran jolting along through the woods, on a rough corduroy road, and I could only catch dim glimpses of my companions' faces as they puffed at their cigars. It had become chilly, and we had left behind the odor of petroleum, and passed into a pleasanter air, laden with the scent of the pines. Above, it was possible, now and then, to see a star sparkling down through the interlaced branches of the trees.

Presently the Major sank back in his seat from talking to Mr. Burns, and told me, in a warm, confidential tone: —

"There's a scout, Mr. Ogden, who hasn't his equal in all the oil-country."

"Who?" said I.

"Schlau — Mr. Burns. He's not engaged in the business now; fact is, he's joined me in a

very interesting little producing scheme, that you're bound to hear of shortly. But his talents as a scout are unsurpassed — superb. He's the sort of man, sir, who can tell oil-smoke a mile off; he'll camp out under the lea of a rock and breakfast on a cigar and a flask of whiskey."

"Rare powers of digestion," said I.

"No, sir — not a bit of it; rare brains; rare detective skill," the Major insisted. "Yes, sir, it's brains. Compare his method of scouting with any other man's, and you'll see it. Always works on salary. Seldom sends a 'pointer'; but when he does, his principal knows it's reliable, and speculates on it. That's Schlau. Now take Tappeau or Pennent. Watch their manœuvres; full of mystery; rush into town; send off cipher-despatch; rub their hands; talk about pistol practice, and sitting up on trees or lying under derricks for a dozen hours; and, maybe, the market won't budge. Why? Because, sir, if the lies told by these fellows could be resolved into air, sir, our atmosphere would reach to the moon."

"But you wouldn't take all credit for cunning away from every scout but Schlau, would you?" I asked.

"I only quarrel with their alleged methods," said he, "though really they have all but one. Just read this rot that's being published about By. Lewes's discovery of '949'; how he hid behind stumps, watched up in trees, and got under the derrick. He did nothing of the kind. He did simply what Philip of Macedon would have done under the circumstances — or Schlau; he squeezed a hundred-dollar bill into the hand of the guard. And what did the guard? He became intently concerned about nothing at all, sir, and wandered off to attend to it, while By. possessed himself of the news that made oil tumble to a half-dollar a barrel, and himself seven thousand dollars richer, but not the bloated capitalist the papers would have him to be."

The Major was warming in his subject, and no doubt would have told me very much more of the secrets of scouting, but we had left the corduroy road, and, passing several houses, were now drawing slowly up and depositing each wagon its load of shouting occupants, before a long, low structure, of boards, brilliantly illuminated, alike within and without, by the roaring, ubiquitous gas-jets. Through the open windows, too, came the sound of music — or of musical instruments;

and about the door was gathered a hatless crowd of men, much the same in appearance as we of Sandhole, for, as with us, the collarless, uncomfortable-looking gentleman in "boiled" shirt and stiff, creased clothes largely predominated. And they greeted us with loud, hearty cheers as we filed into the ball-room.

Long and low it was, being a depot for oil-well supplies. A brick chimney ran up through the centre of the floor to the roof, where the rafters were all exposed, and netted together with cobwebs. Along one side of the room, rough boards were crossed and nailed into shelves, wherein we tossed our hats, and the ladies their "things." At the far end, on a high platform, was the orchestra, consisting of four pieces: a consumptive, but tireless fiddler; a cornetist with amazing lungs; a small boy apparently suspended to a large triangle; and a maiden organist, who knew but one accompaniment, though, in all justice to her, she knew it very well. Our entrance did not check the progress of the ball. The orchestra burst boldly forth into the strains of the "Blue Danube," and the floor was alive with whirling, wriggling couples. By far the greater number of the

women were decked in a profusion of cheap jewelry and many-colored ribbons; but there was also a sprinkling of whiter, gentler faces among them, who held themselves aloof, and gazed about with supercilious mien. These were generally younger, and their garb was plainer — even tasty. With the former, the collarless driller or torpedoer waltzed silently, in slow, solemn gyrations, with his head on high, and that unspeakable look on his face, telling plainly that he felt himself to be the object of universal and even envious criticism. With the latter, the gorgeous wildcatter or modest scout danced with livelier and more graceful step, venturing the while to laugh and chat, though it was very evident that affability, under such circumstances, was the height of affectation.

The Major, leaving me at one of the lower windows, in the company of Schlau, had made off to the side of a stout, short lady in blue silk dress, whom he was now vigorously fanning. She turned her face towards us presently, and it was very round and good-natured, but dotted all about the mouth and chin with little strips of black court-plaster. She nodded to us, and Schlau bowed back with a broad smile.

"Funny little woman," he said; "full of pluck."

"Who is she?"

"Widow of a man named Gurley. He struck it rich last year at Bradford, but came over here and shot himself two months ago. 'Went short' when he shouldn't. She took in washing at Sandhole for a month; but some one gave her a 'pointer' in the Gas Hollow strike, and she's fixed all right."

The Major, having spun the widow about in the waltz until he quite spun her breath away, now suddenly led her in front of us, and presented me to her.

"It's work with me now, Mr. Ogden," she exclaimed, feebly. "I'd rather wash than waltz."

"Nonsense, madam," said the Major; "you dance like an Egyptian Alma. How was it said by Byron? —

"'Endearing waltz — to the more melting tune' —"

"Bosh!" interposed the widow, with a vexed look. "Why can't you be honest, Major?"

"What!" cried he, with amazed eyes; — "Schlau! — Mr. Ogden! — bear witness; have you ever seen a more graceful —?"

She interrupted him again with an angry tap of her fan upon the hand with which he was impressively gesticulating.

"Major," she said; "don't be a fool! Take me to a seat, and get me some ice-cream. I'm as hot as a coal."

He moved off with her, smiling blandly, and they were soon lost in the jolting whirlpit of waltzers. Schlau laughed softly.

"This is a queer world," said he, reflectively; "and I don't believe there's a queerer place on it than this country."

"How so?"

"Why, the people! the way they come and go, rise and fall; all kinds of them, smart and dumb, good and bad. The mines out West can't touch us. Look at Kennedy; he's in overalls now, running an engine. He had the chair of chemistry when I was in college; but he came here and sunk three dusters. — Or the Major," he added after a pause.

"Has he sunk a duster, too?"

It was not reassuring to hear of such things. From what he and the Major said, I began to feel that a hotel on the Devil's Hat might, after all, be a safer venture than a well.

"A duster?" laughed Schlau; "a dozen dusters, rather. He's been everything in the oil-country, but always something; he's too smart to be nothing. He used to be a big man at Sandhole; but he got it into his head that Angell's 'belt theory' was a sound one, and sunk most all his money on that line."

More interesting intelligence! Were we, also, sinking our money on that line? It was at least unpleasant to hear Schlau talk in this vein; and I was glad to have him suggest a trip to the refreshment-room. It was a small apartment or shed to the right of the ball-room, and Tickly-Bender was there, in shirt-sleeves, at a long bench, slicing down ham, which several ladies rapidly converted into sandwiches.

"This is the owner of the 'Terror,' Mr. Ogden," said Schlau. "Examine your sandwich before you eat it. See that there is no glycerine between the lids."

The ladies laughed, and Tickly-Bender swore in a genial, amusing voice, at which the ladies laughed the louder.

"Wouldn't hurt you if there was any in 'em," said Tickly.

"No, of course not," Schlau returned, in a

bantering tone; "you moonshiners eat it, I suppose, like the rebels used to eat gunpowder, till it turns round and eats *you*. Ask these ladies how they lost their husbands, Tickly. Isn't it so, Mrs. Williams?"

The three relicts of "diseased" torpedoers became suddenly very demure, but the one addressed pursed her lips, and answered with sundry shakes of her head, —

"You're right, Mr. Burns; jus' talk to him. Make him stop 'shinin', and be a reg'lar, if nothing else. The way he fools with glycerine is a sin and a shame. If *I* was his wife —"

We could only conjecture what might happen in such an event, for Tickly interrupted her with another harmless oath and grin: —

"You folks er unnatcherl timid. I tell you, ye *can* eat it."

"Like the girl at '46,'" said Schlau.

"O, yes!" Mrs. Williams assented, "like the girl at '46.'"

"She ran up on the derrick floor," explained Schlau, turning to me, but gazing at Tickly-Bender, "and dipped her finger in the nitro-glycerine, which was almost ready to lower into the well. Then she tripped back to her husband

—just been married a week—and stuck her finger in her mouth, 'only to taste it'; brought her teeth together, and whoop! off goes her jaw."

"Which I say," commented Tickly, pausing with his knife half-buried in the ham, "supposin' it's true, was a dast good thing for her husband."

"You see," said Mrs. Williams, dismally, "what moonshinin' 's brought him to. He's a regular infidel."

"Now, I tell you what it is," Tickly resumed, "glycerine 's been a friend to many a man outside o' wildcatters. I knowed one—that's Seth Suttle—over be Warren, that it paid a debt of five hundred dollars for once, by destroyin' the due-bill an' the creditor—that was Parks. They was out walkin' together, an' Parks seen a empty glycerine-can in the road, so he run ahead an' kicked it, 'an' the bucket'—as Seth says—'together.'"

"This Seth Suttle," remarked Schlau, as we moved, laughing, away, "admits that he can't help but lie. He tells a story about going over the hills on horseback with a can of glycerine in his right hand. The horse stumbles; the can slips, and swings under him, but, of course, he can't remember the details. Anyhow, the mare

is disembowelled; its head, tail, and four limbs torn off, and up they go — Seth says, he can't tell how high, but it was very lofty. Coming down, the shell of the mare spread out like a parachute, and the descent was pleasant but irregular. Altogether, the experience impressed him, he says, as being very peculiar, and he can never forget it."

Inside the ball-room the air was stifling hot, and adulterated with unsavory materials, chiefly cigar-smoke, which drifted into the low building through the open windows and doors, and ascended to the rafters, where it floated among the cobwebs as a fine, bluish haze. The orchestra was indefatigable, the iron-lunged labors of the cornetist claiming especial notice. The revellers were dancing with less care but more effort; and, glancing at the wilted collar of the wildcatter, I now perceived some glimmering of wisdom in the driller's eccentric disregard of it as an article of full dress. A notable figure, seen here and there, was the clerk or waiter at the hotel, who had generally a mustache — sometimes complete imperial — of such jet-black hue as to make one wonder if it was natural or acquired.

At that interesting period in a "square" dance

when partners confront each other with certain pedal demonstrations, this gentleman always departed from the customary motions, and with astonishing nimbleness executed a "double-shuffle," to the great delight of the ladies, and envy of the other gentlemen of the set.

The night wore on. It became very tedious, at length, chatting to the oil-men, and gazing at the dancers incessantly whirling. Major Dibbs was everywhere, and always with that large, self-complacent smile stretching the skin taut over his cheek-bones, and bringing into greater prominence his robust aquiline nose. When the gentlemen had danced themselves moist, they retired for a spell into the outer air, and smoked. Here, at last, Schlau and I came together again, under the gas-pipes. He was yawning.

"Are you a good walker?" he asked.

"Fairly good."

"How would you like to walk back to Sandhole? We may have to wait until four in the morning for the teams."

I was glad to go. So we lighted cigars, and set off through the woods. It was a delicious relief to inspire the piny air, and hear the discordant sound of the violin and cornet grow

faint and fainter as we strode along the corduroy road.

"I'd rather drink a pint of benzine," said Schlau, "than attend another ball, even for the benefit of the families of lamented torpedoers."

"Is the mortality among those men so great?"

"It's enormous," he said; "but not so large now as it used to be. The company that has the torpedo monopoly can't last long; it charges such enormous sums, the producers won't stand it. That's how these moonshiners, like Tickly-Bender, sprung up. They run mighty big risks, smuggling their glycerine in, and torpedoing at night."

I wanted to hear more of the "belt theory," of which he had spoken so slightingly, and on the strength of which we were sinking our "Mystery" well; but I feared to arouse his suspicions by displaying too great an interest in it. Once I alluded to what Major Dibbs had said of their "little producing scheme"; but he only laughed. I felt assured, however, that neither he uor the Major had an inkling of the real nature of our operations on the Devil's Hat; and this report, I knew, would give Joyce great gratification.

We walked on, then, through most of the dis-

tance in silence, smoking our cigars. At times a light breeze whispered overhead, in the pines, and shook down on us a shower of dry needles. Otherwise, all was still, save for our footsteps; with the gloom of the woods on either hand, and a glimpse of star-studded sky in front of us.

Finally, we came out into a broad clearing, and ascended an easy slope through deep dust and among stumps of trees; and then there was a glow in the sky ahead, growing steadily brighter until we gained the top of the hill, and looked down over the derricks and tanks upon Sandhole, where it lay blazing up into the night like an oper-grate fire in a darkened room.

CHAPTER V.

Onward they drive in dreadful race,
Pursuers and pursued ;
Before that tide of flight and chase
How shall it keep its rooted place ?
— *The Lady of the Lake.*

I DISLIKE to write the record of this day. I feel just such a disinclination at the outset, my reader, as you doubtless feel to begin the reading of it. For it all comes back to me now; I know I must live it all over again; and at the end feel the same shock that I did at the close of that day.

Such a beautiful day, too; so full of light and color. I never saw the pines look greener; they really seemed conscious of my presence, and very proud of their own good looks. The air was unusually pure; a shower of the night before had cleared and cooled it, and now, out of the north, there came, at times, gentle breezes from the great fresh lakes, which swept away from our high ground the lingering scent of petroleum, that hung so persistently in the woods below.

The Devil's Hat looked wonderfully clear and glossy; its great patches of moss, answering for nap, showed velvety and fresh; the abundant tangle of honeysuckle had an unwonted briskness of bud and leaf; the rocks themselves, commonly a dull gray, had been polished by the spirited little shower, until the mica in their composition sparkled merrily, like a thousand laughing eyes, around the crisp lichens; and, to cap it all, and fill our cup to overflowing, the cat-bird, flicker, and thrush, which, foregoing their internecine struggles, in the teeth of a common peril, had barely deigned, in the past month, to open their throats, perhaps fearing to choke with anger at our trespass, now responding to the gentle compulsion of Nature, found sudden voice and wing, and caused every hollow in the Devil's Hat to resound with their chirping proclamations of peace and good-will.

When I had briefly recounted to Joyce what I had seen and heard at the Roughtown ball, he appeared greatly relieved.

"I was really afraid," he said, "that Dibbs had smelt a rat, from the way that fellow he

sent here looked at the hotel. I told him there was a hitch in the plans, and that the work would not move on very fast until we adjusted it."

For Schlau's disparagement of the "belt theory" he had only a light laugh.

"Certainly," he said; "all the scouts scoff at it. It's their business to be suspicious of everything."

So the days passed by, and the drill had steadily bored its way into the earth's rind, through the first, second, and third "sands," while we slowly erected the hotel; but, one afternoon, Tim, our driller, had sent word for us to come down to the Pit.

"Pardon, gents," he said; "it's none o' my business, but I thought I'd give ye word. Is all arrangements made?"

"For what?" demanded Joyce.

Tim grinned.

"That's more 'n I can say," said he. "Call it *emergence*, anyhow. What I'm a-drivin' at is, supposin' she's *not* a 'duster,' are ye ready?"

"I think so," Joyce replied, biting his fingernails nervously.

"The extra tanks?" queried Tim.

"Why, when is it to be?" I asked, in surprise. "Not to-morrow, Tim?"

He could scarcely conceal his disgust.

"Ye're not goin' to wait till the day before, are ye? D'ye mean to say, you've not fixed things at 'Change yet?"

"Of course we have," said Joyce. "Bedford's our man there."

"All right, then," resumed Tim, placid again. "But if I was sinkin' this Mystery, I'd go right now an' see me broker, an' tell him not to dare to leave town for the next week — to be ready day an' night for a 'cipher.'"

"Only for a week, Tim?"

"That's enough. Before this comin' Tuesday, ye're goin' to strike oil or dust, one or th' other."

Therefore, the next morning, boarding the narrow-gauge train at Sandhole, I had gone to Oil City, and at once sought the Exchange. Bedford — a thin young man, who could stand for an instant tranquil as a lamb, and then break suddenly forth, with a nimble spring and flashing eyes, into maniacal yells — was there, of course, and he came at the call of a messenger, and led me into the sacred — rather, the infernal enclosure; into pandemonium, at any rate.

It was not pleasant to converse with Mr. Bedford. He would glance calmly up from reading a despatch just handed him, and meet my eyes with an inquiring, attentive expression; but, before I could accept his mute invitation to speak, the brief lull, that perhaps had succeeded a wild storm of yells, would give way to a quick scramble and rush towards the circular railing; Mr. Bedford would instantly bound off and be swallowed up in the living whirlpool, and my ears would again fairly split with the savage uproar. It was like any other stock exchange, only it could be heard further — each of the brokers was a Stentor.

"You'll have to excuse me," said Bedford, returning from one of his sudden flights. "I know what you want. Wait until recess, and we'll discuss it over some lunch."

But he would find time to bring up dozens of friends and present them to me, always as his "old friend, Mr. Ogden"; and these gentlemen would tarry a second or two, receive and tear up countless telegrams, littering the sanded floor with their fragments, and then dash swiftly away, often with unearthly shouts. It was noticeable, however, that the most agile

and noisy brokers were very young; some, mere boys. Not a few of the older members retired at intervals to the sides of the large room, and lounged about on the chairs and tables, smoking and chatting.

When, at length, the session was ended, Bedford had joined me, and together we strolled, talking, out towards the river. I told him in few words the little I had to say.

"Don't worry about me," he smiled; "strike a 'gusher,' and I'll fix the rest. If it's a big thing, just send me word — *Get plenty of nails* — something like that. But I'm sort of sorry you came down. I don't see well how you could have helped it: a letter to me posted at Sandhole would have been worse; but I saw Dibbs at the door. He's the man you'll have to watch."

"Major Dibbs?"

"Yes; he has been here for several days. He saw you, of course: he could see animalculæ with his naked eye. Look out for him."

But, lo! when we entered the lunch-room, there, at a corner table, sat the Major, drinking beer in the company of a very blond gentleman, abundantly whiskered. He espied us, and in-

stantly arose, meeting me with outstretched hands and indrawn lips.

"My dear lamb," said he, "come, come; let me take you away before this wicked Bedford can fleece you."

"You know my old friend Ogden, do you, Major?" said Bedford, in a tone of pleased surprise. "Good! Do you, Sandy?"

The blond gentleman did not; so Bedford took his hand as though it were a precious thing, and placed it in mine.

"Gentlemen," he said, binding our hands together with his own, "know each other."

We proceeded to do so, and soon were all four amicably breaking bread and cracking jokes.

"I have told Ogden," said Bedford, boldly, "that he had better stick to his last. If he comes to the 'margin,' he may fall in and perish. Better be satisfied with slow, steady profits, after all; eh, Major?"

"Depends on the man and the business," said he. "I should think a paying hotel might satisfy Mr. Ogden; but a paying paper doesn't satisfy me; so I have no right to advise him. Ask Sandy!"

The blond gentleman shrugged his shoulders; and Bedford laughed.

"Sandy?" he said. "I'd as soon think of getting sage advice from a moonshiner. Here's a man, Ogden, who once had a little paradise of a hundred thousand dollars; he lost it; then regained it; then lost it again. On the 11th of December he actually got it back *doubled;* he left 'Change with more than two hundred thousand dollars to his credit, the luckiest dog in town. Then he gave an oyster supper; everybody was there. Sandy opened nearly every bottle of champagne to be had in Oil City; and, after a bit, Mr. Davis says, — 'Sandy, you wouldn't want to buy in any more at $1.08\frac{1}{2}$, would you?' — 'Lots of it,' says Sandy — "

Here the blond gentleman and the Major were seized with such a loud fit of laughter that Bedford had to pause.

"'Lots of it," says Sandy, he presently resumed: "'200,000?' says Davis; '500,000!' says Sandy. And he took all that was offered him. The next morning he woke up and heard about the 'gusher' at Balltown, and when he got to 'Change found oil selling at $89\frac{3}{4}$, and he owed the market fifty thousand dollars.

That's the kind of man the Major wants you to listen to."

"Is it really true?" I asked of "Sandy." He nodded his head in a sheepish way.

"It didn't worry me," he said. "I hadn't time to get my hands on the money, so I couldn't feel the loss."

"But he's a fair sample of us," continued Bedford. "Take my advice: let oil alone; it will burn your fingers. If Dibbs would confess, he'd tell you the same sort of a story; but he's ashamed."

The Major had been eyeing Bedford with a curious expression, amused and amusing.

"I believe in petroleum," said he. "It is the wonder of the age. I am willing to live and die by it, Bedford. Moreover, I am even anxious to produce it, and give light to the world, as you may have heard."

"You and Burns? Yes; but you'll fail, Major! mark my word! Sandhole is a town born of the 'gusher'; has but a few short days to live, and —"

"Because," interposed the Major, mildly, "a crowd of boys, armed with gimlets, have attacked a single barrel of cider in a cellar full of them, and sucked the particular barrel dry, it doth not

signify, my dear Bedford, that all the cider in that cellar is exhausted."

"No; but the question is, are you boring into a fresh, full barrel, Dibbs? Don't put your crazy ideas into Ogden's head. For my part, as an old friend of his, I am sorry he has risked any of his money even in that hotel. Sandhole will be a played-out field inside of a year."

He had carried on the conversation with admirable tact; but when I left the three at the Exchange building I was by no means sure of Major Dibbs. That ever-present smile and puzzling excess of politeness rendered his talk and face inscrutable.

"If for nothing else," said he, in bidding me good-by, "than to come here as to the oil-man's Gotham, periodically, as the long-haired driller does, to shoot away his hard-earned wage and ventilate his garments of the smell of oil, the journey is pleasant and profitable, isn't it? even if one doesn't venture into the Exchange."

When I related this episode to Joyce, he became very uneasy, but, as the week went by and nothing occurred to disturb our operations, he regained his confident air, though he was now grown exceedingly nervous.

And thus matters stood with us at the Hat on this glorious August morning. Quite early Joyce had come panting up from the Pit, and, entering my room, where I stood, razor in hand, before a cracked mirror, had startled me perilously by exclaiming: —

"We'll strike the sand before to-morrow. Tim is sure of it."

So now you may understand why my thoughts were not wholly centred on the scene around me, as I descended the southern slope of the Hat and set out on my customary constitutional. The crisp air, and the excitement produced in me by Joyce's intelligence, quickened my gait, and soon I had crossed the open level that separated us on all sides from the forest, and found myself stepping briskly along a rough road, which bore signs of recent travel. The birds hopped and chirped among the branches, the dew glistened on the leaves and scanty blades of grass, and, lured on by that copious flow of unrelated ideas which virtually amounts to vacuity itself, I followed the rocky path up and down, and over the rude log platforms covering blackened bogs and patches of oily morass. At the bottom of a small but steep hill, I suddenly heard behind me the rumbling sound of wheels.

Instantly I thought of the "moonshiners" — those reckless and lawless triflers with nitro-glycerine, wild stories of whom I had often heard, and whom, of late, I had repeatedly seen jogging, nay, galloping, along the rocky roads in their light wagons, filled with cans of the terrible explosive. Reports had recently reached the Hat of a succession of frightful calamities, one of them being the so complete annihilation of a half-dozen frolicsome moonshiners that the combined obsequies had been held over a single cigar-box only half full of the discoverable remains; — so I came to a perturbed halt, and, as I listened, undecided what to do, the noise of the wheels grew louder, and above it rang the loud laughter of men and the cracking of whips.

As the distant wagon rolled rumbling over the logs in the hollow beyond the hill, I fancied I caught the merry laugh of a woman — a moment later I was sure I had — for two voices, unmistakably female, broke forth together in a suppressed cry of alarm, and simultaneously a second rumble, much louder than the first, warned me of the approach of another wagon.

I had only time to step aside in the thick tangle of blackberry-bushes when the foremost team

galloped over the crest of the hill. Two powerful bays were attached to a stout road-wagon, and on the front seat, whip in hand, with a smile on his lips, sat "Schlau" Burns, the scout I had met at the Roughtown ball. My glance simply comprehended him in passing, for it naturally rested on the strange occupants of the back seat, — two women, ladies beyond doubt, and evidently mother and daughter, both clad in mourning, who sat with clasped hands, their faces flushed with excitement.

"Better run!" shouted Schlau, catching sight of me, as I stepped forward into view. "Tickly-Bender 's racing us. He's got fifty gallons aboard."

The girl turned her pretty face, and looked at me curiously; and then, just as they vanished past, I became aware that the eyes of her companion were riveted on me with an expression of great surprise. In the very brief instant that our gaze met, she averted her face with a sudden start, and the team rushed by. Was it a face I had seen before, or not? But I had no time to reflect, for Schlau had barely lashed his bays around the rocky curve, when the head of a shaggy gray horse bounded in sight at the top of

the hill. I stood my ground — indeed, I had no time to retreat — and surveyed the "Terror," as Tickly-Bender's glycerine outfit was known round about Sandhole. A harmless-looking vehicle it was, affording the innocent beholder no hint of the resistless force that slumbered within the square box. This was its appearance, that of a large store-box, painted black as night, set upon high springs and light running gear, while on either side there were rests or crutches, in which reclined long tin cans or cylinders, pencil-shaped. The deadly character, I say, of this vehicle would scarcely have been suspected by the casual observer, but, perhaps, a careful scrutiny of it might have awakened some suspicion. For the very unusual height and delicacy of the springs were certainly significant, and I am not sure but that, in a curious or inquiring mind, the ghastly cross-bones and skull which the whimsical taste of Tickly-Bender had caused to appear in ghostly white on the front and two sides of the black box would have provoked doubts as to the pacific nature of its contents.

I had never seen this notorious object before, but its owner I recognized at a glance; a short, slight man of middle age, clean-shaven, and with

a very docile look. A blue-shirted personage sat beside him on the glycerine-box, and both were singing lustily on top of a quantity of explosive sufficient to make mince-meat of the American army. They were evidently under the influence of liquor, for Tickly-Bender was mercilessly whipping the fine gray mare, which plainly needed no such goad to action. She came dashing towards me in great leaps, the awful black box swaying and jolting on its springs. The two men were shouting the chorus of a song, which ran, —

> "We're 'shiners, were shiners ! and here we come,
> To bust a duster by rule o' thumb.
> We'll skeer the devil deaf an' dumb,
> An' burn him up with petrolee-yum !"

The spectacle, while appalling, had yet a certain humor in it. These two foolhardy fellows lolling blasphemously above a volcano that threatened with every jolt to belch forth and scatter them in atoms to the skies. Tickly-Bender, leaning forward to secure a closer grip on the lines and check his flying and now frantic steed, caught sight of me, and screamed : —

"Yi-yi ! We'll ketch Schlau, or bust !"

That instant had well nigh been our last. The

withdrawal of his attention, however brief, from the excited animal — doubtless a slight slack in the tension of the lines — had caused her to swerve towards me, and I fell bodily back as she reared aloft with flashing eyes and distended nostrils — another version of death on the pale horse. I saw the wheels revolving dizzily on the edge of the narrow road, — an inch or two more and they must surely dash against that chestnut stump, — and I shudderingly closed my eyes, with a fluttering fear at my heart of the horrible roar and reverberation that would follow; and, in the second which elapsed, I had a sickening vision of a great opening in the earth and a vast cloud of dust. — A loud oath and laugh from the lips of Tickly-Bender opened my eyes. The team was speeding safely on in the mad race, and as it swung round the curve, out of view, I read, in rude letters, of a brimstone hue, the apt inscription on the rear end of the black box — "The Terror."

CHAPTER VI.

Nature, impartial in munificence,
Has gifted man with all-subduing will:
Matter, with all its transitory shapes,
Lies subjected and plastic at his feet.
— SHELLEY, *Queen Mab.*

As I strode across the top of the Hat I heard Joyce whistling in his old, sweet way, and presently I descried him pacing up and down the bridge that we had thrown across the Pit. He hurried towards me, and grasped both my hands. He had never been so demonstrative before.

"Ogden," he said, in a half-whisper, "an hour or two will prove the sanity of my scheme, and make us both rich."

"I hope so," I answered, gayly, "more for your sake, Joyce, than mine." — He looked so queerly at me, as though distrusting the sincerity of this remark, that I added, in a warm tone: — "You know, my dear fellow, I am quite alone in the world now; I have no one but myself to work for, while you have doubtless" — His

brows had suddenly contracted, and he interrupted me pettishly:—

"What has that to do with our venture? There'll be money enough for both of us; I sha'n't want to borrow of you."

"You misunderstand me," said I, piqued by his tone; "I wish only to impress upon your mind that, in the event of the failure of our enterprise, I shall not be overwhelmed by the blow."

"Thanks, thanks! but really you need anticipate no disaster. Tim has just sent for us, and I think it very likely we shall strike oil before we know it. Let us visit the well and see."

Going down into the Pit, I told him of my adventure in the woods. He paused, and asked:—

"Are you sure it was Schlau who drove the women?"

"Absolutely. He spoke to me."

"Stay a minute. I don't like his being about here just now. We were fools not to have bought more land."

"What do you mean?"

"I think I now understand what that hook-

nosed editor of the *Spouter* meant this morning. I met him at the post-office, and he was anxious, as usual, to know how our 'hotel' was coming along. He also asked if I had seen the 'black cat and kitten' that Schlau Burns had caught. Evidently, those women are sinking a well further down the creek."

"But I can't see how that will affect us."

"It can't, at present, if Schlau keeps away from us. But perhaps their well is located on the line — yet, pshaw! there's no use leaping to conclusions."

"What was your conclusion?"

"That if this 'black cat' and her 'kitten' strike oil hereafter, their gain may prove our loss; that is, being further down the line, they may tap a more prolific sand, and drain from our reservoir."

He looked quite disturbed conjuring this calamity. I rallied him with a jest, and he entered the well-house. Tim, our driller, sat faithfully at his post, pipe in mouth, watching carefully the regular rise and fall of the rod. Tim was very independent and self-poised, as every honest man ought to be. He merely nodded his head to us, and smoked calmly on.

"How are we coming along, Tim?" said Joyce.

"Why, gents," he answered, slowly, "it's my opinion we'll soon be there."

"How soon?"

"Well, a half-hour, say."

We both looked at him in astonishment.

"A half-hour, Tim? What makes you think so?" I asked.

"The gas. And look at that."

He held up some fine, wet sand, apparently pure silica, unmixed with slate.

"Looks like the right stuff," he continued.

"You think, then —" Joyce was eagerly saying.

"I think nothing," Tim drawled with a deprecating frown. — For, you see, Tim had been in the oil-fields ever since they were first opened, playing successively, like many another unlucky wretch, the rôles of wildcatter, producer, speculator, contractor, and driller, and he could not conceal his intolerance of the enthusiasm of callow wildcatters.

Joyce's expectant look faded away, as quickly as it had bloomed, at Tim's sang-froid, who presently removed his pipe, and added, with an ill-

suppressed excitement in his voice, and a sympathetic gleam in his blue eye: —

"No, sir, I *think* nothing; but I tell you what I *know*. — I know that if this here well ain't a gusher, I'm a liar!"

Joyce looked at me triumphantly, and, seizing the rough old fellow by one of his grimy hands, wrung it cordially. "Thanks, Tim," he said, his face aglow; "many thanks; and if it is a 'gusher,' I swear I'll not forget you."

"Don't thank Tim," muttered that callous person; "but thank God. I didn't put the petroleum under yer drill." Nevertheless, the two terra-cotta lines on his blackened face which denoted the presence of lips stretched gradually towards either ear, and Tim was smiling. Then in the best of spirits we sat watching the arsis and thesis of the drill. Joyce handed me a cigar, and Tim, with just a hint of his old contempt, refusing the one proffered him, sociably lighted a fresh pipe.

"You've seen to the tanks, gents?" he suddenly asked.

"Yes," said Joyce; "but will the small ones answer until we can make the pipe connection?"

"Can't say, sir. I don't know everything, you see; but I guess we can manage with the two we've got, until then; and, if we can't, what's a hundred barrel or so loss in thousan's?"

We laughed good-naturedly. It is so easy to be jolly when you are confronted by the prospect of impending good-fortune.

"Beg your pardon, gents, but does either of you know a scout named Schlau?" We both assented.

"Well, I want to tell you to keep your eye on him, if you can. It's my opinion you can't —he's too quick and smart. What he don't know about oil ain't worth a candle."

"'What are you driving at, Tim?" demanded Joyce.

"Why, when I was in Sandhole Sunday, he comes up to me in the Bullwheel bar and makes hisself outrageous pleasant, a-misterin' and sirrin' me, and a-settin' up beer bottles like ninepins; all which," smiled Tim, "I bowled out like a regular prize-roller. But bimeby he calls up a fellow with a green eye and a hook nose, and says, 'Mister Tim Paxson, permit me to introduce you to Major

Dibbs, the talented editor of the Sandhole *Spouter* — you should read it, by all means, Mister Paxson; it's a stunnin' sheet.' — So those two began soft-sodderin' me, and settin' 'em up lively, talkin' all the time about oil, and how scarce good scouts was.

"'Why, I tell you what, Major,' say Schlau, 'the market's just ripe for workin' now. I'd give anything for a good, honest pointer. It'd really be worth thousan's to a man who'd know how to use it. Now,' says he, 'here's Mister Paxson; he'd make a magnificent scout, wouldn't he?' — 'Gordjus!' says Dibbs. 'I tell you, Paxson, ole fellow,' says Schlau, 'it's a sin and a shame for you to be a-tinkerin' and a-hammerin' up there at the Hat for a dollar or two a day, when you might be a-makin' hunderds — ain't it, Major?' 'It's a crime,' says he; 'it's a d—d outrage.' 'But mebbe,' says Schlau, eyin' me very close and 'cute, 'mebbe Mister Paxson don't hammer so much on the hotel, after all; I guess he keeps his eyes open, and his hands really don't look as if he confined his attention strictly to wood-work.' Which," Tim honestly avowed, holding up the unsightly members to view, "which is cer-

tainly correct. You see, I had to be careful, so I tried to look very dumb, — no great job for me, — and says, 'No; I did all sorts of work on the Hat, diggin', carpenterin', and everything'; and then they begun to back water, and talk about something else. But, all of a sudden, the Major spoke up, tryin' to catch me. — 'What're you doin' in the Pit?' he says. But it didn't work. 'Nothin' at all,' says I, 'only runnin' our little hydraulic ram to pump water to the shanties.' They was very much surprised, for they looked at each other, and the Major says, 'By G—d! I never thought of that.' — Now I wasn't so dumb that I couldn't see what gave 'em their clew. Did you gents ever think of finding where this water comes out again in the air when it gets from under the Hat? Well, I did. It takes a turn, and runs right under the level to that place in the woods they call the 'Soda Fountain.'"

"I see," said Joyce; "the sound of the drill" —

"Runs out underground with the water. Yes, sir; you're right it does. I went there Sunday, after I left them two, and by listenin' ever

so careful, sure enough, I heard the click-clickety-click. Do you think a thing like that'd miss Schlau's ears? — 'specially on a clear, still night? But you see it made him shaky when I said we had a hydraulic ram a-goin' in the Pit, and last night I muffled the rod all I could. He's sinkin' a well hisself down on the creek, and I promised to meet him and the Major again 's afternoon. It's my opinion I ought to, so 's to keep 'em in tow to-night, else you'll make nothing by spec."

This was a very long speech for any one to make, but a most remarkable effort, considering it came from Tim, usually so reticent. This fact alone convinced us of the importance of his suggestion; so it was determined that as soon as the oil flowed Tim should set out for Sandhole, and despatch the news in cipher to Bedford, our broker. He was then to keep his appointment with Schlau.

While we talked together, the sun had reached his zenith, and the fiery rays danced on the threshold of the well-house, and sparkled in the flashing waters as they took their subterranean plunge. In the centre of the Pit, a pillar of unbroken lines of light descended vertically from

the mouth like a celestial column, and through it I could see the jagged rocks, whose sombre masses showed like the roughly dug-out shadows in a wood-cut. Above, the edge of the log bridge was just discernible, and on the outermost branch of a maple-shoot, which projected with insecure tenure from the rocky slope, hopped and chirped a happy robin. I remember these trivial things because I then remarked them as forming so fantastic a combination of sounds, — the innocent utterance of this daredevil redbreast; the sudden rush and splash of the suicidal stream; the creaking of the ponderous wooden arm; and the regular click of the drill.

Tim was refilling his pipe when it occurred. The drill refused to click, but there came from the well, instead, a sucking noise, which grew louder each instant, and the great rope lifted and slacked. Tim sprang to the engine — none too soon; for, gurgling and rumbling in its effort to get free, the precious fluid, brackish at first, and then amber-hued and green, suddenly shot upward through the tubes with a loud report, and Joyce, pale as a ghost, stood joyfully smiling, all drenched in the rank flood.

Our well was indeed a "gusher."

CHAPTER VII.

I remember the way we parted
The day and the way we met.

—*Swinburne.*

THE sky was veiled with fine, feathery cloud as I leisurely strolled around the north and east rim of the Hat. There was that summer stillness about me that I love; not the brooding silence of midnight, but a stillness all instinct with tranquil life, from the droning of the insects at my feet to the noiseless circling of the hawk in mid-air.

All was well in the Pit. Tim had set out for Sandhole, bearing the momentous message to Bedford, our broker; and now, while Joyce kept watch in the well-house, I paced about as sentinel. Issuing from a grove of stunted pines into the open site of our pseudo-hotel, I observed, on the southern horizon, a mountain-like mass of black cloud that presaged a rainy night; and, moved by a sudden impulse, I called one of the workmen, whom we had employed in the rather difficult task of at once promoting and preventing

the erection of an amorphous-looking structure, and bade him keep a sharp lookout for intruders until I returned. For, glancing at the forest-line below, I had taken it into my head to visit the "Soda Fountain," where Tim had said the waters which plunged into the Pit sought daylight again. The spot was not a great distance from the edge of the woods; and, by following up a sinuous path faintly defined in the stony ground, I shortly came upon it behind a great rock that sloped gently inward. Out of this single jaw poured our stream, limpid, cool, and serene, with no traces in its placid depths of the dashing energy that distinguished its deportment in the Pit. I bent my ear at the opening, and caught, feebly at first, like the faint tick of a watch smothered beneath one's pillow, the distant pulsations of oil in our well. But Schlau was too late; his shrewd discovery would avail him nothing.

The air was deliciously soft and sweet, so I sauntered along in the pine shadows, and soon a melancholy fell upon me with the memory of my uncle and his tender love for me, who had so poorly deserved it; and when, at last, the babbling of the brook suddenly loudened into a merry chatter and splash, I looked up and saw the

"Strid" through tears. Saw the Strid — only a large flat rock on either side the narrow brook, which here tumbled swiftly between them — and, seated on the opposite stepping-stone, in a portable chair, placed precariously near the edge, I also saw a girl, dressed in white, so intent upon sketching in a book that she was plainly oblivious of my approach. Her face was almost entirely lost in the plenteous chip hat, tied to her head with a broad, blue ribbon.

Of course, I was greatly surprised to see such a charming object in this out-of-the-way spot, and I'll not deny that it gratified me exceedingly. No one loves natural scenery more than I — but, then, isn't it human to be social?

I said to myself, "The Strid belongs to no one in particular. I have as good right to be here as that girl." So I stiffened my joints, and stepped forward with quite an imposing air. Will you believe me? Five seconds later I was holding this young artist in my arms! Not that we were reunited lovers; if I had had a sweetheart, you assuredly would have known it before this.

But, as I set foot on the large, flat stone, my shadow fell upon her — she started back with

a little scream — her chair swayed on its insecure rest towards the rushing water — and most likely she would have been overboard in that treacherous stream, and I should have been her murderer, had I not leaped the Strid in a trice, and snatched her from the brink.

Then, glancing at the pale, pretty face of the insensible form in my arms, it dawned on me what a boor I had been, and I assure you I have never felt so tired of myself. I was kept in suspense, however, but an instant, for the lids opened, and a pair of blue eyes gazed at me full of surprise, which quickly changed to a horrified gasp, and a searching, frantic, imploring stare, while a lingering shudder ran through the lithe form, that filled me with guilty remorse.

"O-o-o-oh, oh, sir!" she supplicated, pallid with terror.

"My dear miss," I began, in a tone meant to be apologetic and reassuring, "please — "

"O yes, yes, truly; you shall have all the money, sir, you want; oh, sir — thousands — thousands! if you — "

I then had a lucid interval, and, acting upon a simple expedient that suggested itself to me, I managed at once to inspire her with confidence

and courage. I tenderly stood her upon her feet. It was very odd this had not occurred to me sooner.

"If genuine contrition," said I, falling modestly back, almost into the Strid, "has any merit in your eyes, you should pardon me. I am very sorry."

This young lady had remarkable powers of recuperation. She was blushing and smiling in divine virginal style.

"Sorry for what, sir?" said she.

This was too much.

"Really," I said, "you are too forbearing. You forgive in the sweetest Christian spirit, and I can't find words to tell you how thankful I am. But I wouldn't have you think that I am always so awkward as I have been towards you."

"I don't think you were awkward at all. If you were, I don't see how you could leap the Strid so nicely."

She said this with an arch smile, and her cheeks were white and red again.

"True, I was agile enough; but, then, it was very rude of me to appear before you so abruptly."

"Do you think so? Very well. But where is my sketch-book? Did it go by the board?"

I sprang with avidity to the bank, and hurried along the brook. The errant volume lay only a few yards off, grounded upon a shelving spit of pebbles.

"I would not like to lose it," she laughed, while I obsequiously mopped the soaked portfolio with my handkerchief. "It's my *magnum opus*, pictorial and poetical, — a complete record of all my æsthetic efforts."

"I'd like to peep between the lids. May I?"

"Certainly not! Please pass it to me; thanks! you have been very kind. I will dry and press it at home."

"I fancy there will be a poetical entry to-night, beneath your sketch of the Strid, in which I shall figure as the 'beast.' Is it so?"

"Hardly. I never write descriptive verse. Besides, I have a sketch of the original 'Strid,' near Bolton Abbey, with some lines from the Airedale Poet beneath it, and I wouldn't dare — " She suddenly checked herself, and grew very red. "Kindly reach me the chair, won't you? I confess I am not yet equal to venturing near the edge again."

"In other words, I have rendered this lovely spot no longer attractive to you?"

"Oh, no! not at all."

"Then," said I, resolutely, "prove it by returning to-morrow."

I regretted the words as soon as I had uttered them. She saw clear through my transparent ruse, and, fastening her blue eyes coldly and tranquilly upon me, she answered, with provoking indifference, —

"The test is silly. I am done with the Strid; but if I ever wish to revisit it, I surely will do so." — And, inclining the chip hat towards me with careless grace, she moved away.

Had I not been so crestfallen, I would have let her go. But it piqued me to be disposed of so lightly. Advancing a step, I urged: —

"But we are neighbors; let us be neighborly, then. I have the pleasure of knowing Schlau Burns; will you grant me permission to invoke his good offices in the conventional task of making us acquainted?"

At the mention of Schlau's name, she turned in surprise, and said: —

"You are —?"

"John Ogden, of the Devil's Hat."

I knew by the sudden gleam of recognition in her eyes that she now remembered me, as I did her, from the brief view we had caught of each other the day before. Unquestionably, this was Schlau's "Kitten."

"I should think, living under the influence of such Satanic surroundings, Mr. Ogden would have sufficient ingenuity to devise ways and means of making the formal acquaintance of *Miss Corliss*, without invoking the assistance of the lady herself, or even weakening the sentiment of the scheme by informing her of his intention."

I forgave the glib tongue for the sake of the charming picture it afforded me of the pretty blonde head poised so proudly within the great chip hat. I stood at the Strid, and watched her gliding gracefully among the trees. Once, as she left the blazed path for the road, she turned and looked back. I waved my hat, but she took no notice of it, and, slightly averting her head, gazed steadily down the road, plainly to convince me that I had not been in her thoughts at all. It was cutely done, but I thought of Lot's wife, and laughed aloud.

Retracing my steps, it was natural that I should fall to thinking about my strange adven-

ture, for certainly it was a strange adventure to come upon so clever a girl in such a place — and I had held her in my arms! This pleasant reflection was suddenly disturbed, as I approached the Soda Fountain, by the sound of voices, and, when I had come abreast of the large rock, who should emerge from behind it but Schlau Burns and Major Dibbs. I was upon them before they saw me, and Schlau started back in great surprise when I greeted him.

"Well met! well met!" cried the Major, exuberantly.

I said it was a rare privilege to grasp once more the hand that wielded the pen that wrote the lines that moulded the thought of Sandhole.

The Major grinned. — "We have just been talking," he said, "about the natural gas. Why can't it be utilized? Bridled, I mean, by some mechanical process, and its consumption controlled by a stock company!"

"I'm sure I don't know," said I; "perhaps it can."

"Look there! exclaimed Schlau, who had just lighted a cigar. — At his feet, where the burning match had fallen, issued a thin waving flame.

"Why shouldn't that be a decent lamp-post,

and a company of us getting a royalty for its use?"

"Really," said Major Dibbs, "you and Selden ought to look into this matter. In a little while I should think it would be of prime importance to you — the thing of illuminating your hotel. By the by, how does the great work go on?"

He spoke easily, but the craft of the man shone in his eyes. I answered his question equivocally, saying, too, that we had by no means overlooked the question of illuminating the Hat with natural gas.

"It's a pity," said Schlau, "you haven't an attraction up there like the burning well at 'Fifteen's.'"

"I have never heard of it."

"What!" cried the Major — "never heard of Fifteen's! That sounds like the English resident at Windsor who was dying to see the Queen and wanted to know who lived in the Castle. What would you think of a hotel proprietor at Niagara who, in advertising, forgot to mention the Falls in his list of attractions? Every one of your circulars telling the world to come and amuse itself at the Devil's Hat should refer to the 'marvellous

well at Fifteen's, where, in the dark silence of the forest, at regular intervals of five minutes, a column of purest water darts upward from the earth, bubbling, sibilating, rising to a height of fully one hundred feet; and *mirabile dictu!* horror of horrors! on the apex of the liquid silvery shaft burns a hissing point of fire, looking at midnight, in the midst of the forest, like a huge wriggling candle!' Something like that, for instance, which I had in the *Spouter*."

"But is it true?"

"As gospel," said Schlau. "Dibbs doesn't do it justice. Buy it, why don't you? — But I guess the Mystery wouldn't sell it."

"Who is the owner?"

"I forget his name — a curious old chap; they call him 'The Mystery.' You will find him there in his shanty always — he's the only established thing I know of in these regions. Come over some day, and I'll guide you there."

Turning to the Major, when he had issued this invitation, he suddenly looked as though he regretted it. Major Dibbs gazed at Schlau with puckered lips and brow.

"Go with me," he urged, nervously. "I am

a charming companion, as you can well believe. A man has to learn the art of making himself agreeable to everybody when he edits a paper for people who never see their names in print except upon the wrappers. What do you say? We will go together?"

"With pleasure," I assented, enjoying but not understanding his solicitude, — "after I have first proved the hospitality of Mr. Burns. When shall that be?"

Schlau looked vexed. Suddenly he asked, with a searching glance, — "To-morrow?"

I knew, of course, that it would be impossible for me to go, but, betraying no hesitation, I answered that I would regard it as an engagement. There was a puzzled expression on Schlau's face, and the Major had a wild light in his eye.

"Stop!" said he, in a tone meant to be joco-serious, but which sounded extremely unpleasant. "Make it day after to-morrow, — Thursday forenoon, — and I'll arrange things to accompany and enliven you."

Since the postponement suited me so well, I agreed to it heartily; but could not resist the temptation to lavish ironical thanks upon the

Major for his graciousness in thrusting his society upon us.

"I'm an altruist," he retorted, gayly; "I try to live for others all I can. The very least you beneficiaries of my goodness can do for me, when I am gone, will be to canonize me. St. Major Dibbs — the Sandhole Saint — there's something gladsome about the sound, isn't there? It will spread joy through the whole calendar."

Schlau was restive. "Let us understand, then," said he, extending his hand, "that we go to the Burning Well Thursday morning, — say you meet us at eleven o'clock. Perhaps Miss Petrice may go along; she's been there most every day of late, sketching."

"I don't think she's been there to-day," I said, and then briefly told him of my adventure at the Strid. He smiled, but the Major did not.

"I must leave you," I added. "Selden is alone; we sent Tim to Sandhole for nails."

It amused me to see the effect this remark had upon them. I knew they had been "scouting" at the Soda Fountain, in the belief that Tim would or could not keep his appointment. But my assurance upset their calculations. The Major stared at Schlau, whose countenance

plainly mirrored his surprise. They left me at once, and set out with rapid strides towards Sandhole. I was amused, I say, and I think I had a right to be; for now, as then, I believe it was no trivial triumph to have outwitted the cleverest scout in the oil-country.

Hurrying to the Hat, I noticed that the black cloud which an hour before had peeped like a mountain-crest above the southern horizon had so spread itself in vast, sombre folds that it now hung a menacing pall over all the earth.

CHAPTER VIII.

As when the lightning, in a sudden spleen unfolded — .
— DANTE ; *Paradiso*, canto 30.

I FOUND Joyce in the well-house. He greeted me with radiant face, and listened absently while I told him of my meeting with Schlau and the Major.

"We're out of their reach now," he said. "Every tank and tub is filled, and I've got the men building a big box with the lumber of the hotel. It doesn't matter much if we lose a hundred barrels, only we ought to have the full yield to show the scouts."

He looked five years younger in the face to me than he had the day before.

The sky was now black, and only a leaden light pierced to the Pit. Looking upward through the hoop of flaming gas-jets that encircled the mouth, I could see the masses of cloud sweeping across the sky like terror-stricken hordes of evil spirits. That famous battle was waging again between the Angels in revolt and

the Almighty; I was in the Bottomless Pit, and above me the spirits were fleeing in wild rout pursued by the flashing thunderbolts of divine rage. The low muttering and rumble of the combat; the despairing shriek of the wind; the deepening voice of the thunder, breathing a sorrowful rebuke, until, pausing for the dart of the resistless arrow of light, it broke forth into a deafening roar of triumph — I stood watching the sublime scene, until, with a swift, hissing rush, a torrent of rain swept suddenly down into the Pit, seeming to complete my fanciful conception of the fall of the angels.

"Fortune favors us," said Joyce, viewing the shower complacently. "If Tim returns safely, we're all right."

It was such a rain as begat the Deluge, driving down in sheets and swelling our little stream until it plunged roaring into the Pit, a volume too great for its customary vent. Rocks were loosened and tumbled down, choking the narrow passage, and then the water backed faster, and began to creep steadily toward us, threatening the fires in the engine-house. We stood there anxiously watching the rise of the muddy flood, on which floated amorphous masses of whitest foam.

Joyce gazed rather gloomily from the ground to the sky, just as the lightning flashed upon his eager face.

"It can't rain like that long," I said.

"We're lost if it does. Unless there's a lull to let us pick the stones out of that hole, the Pit will be flooded."

The lull came at length, and none too soon. The wind blew apart the purple cloud-curtain; savagely tore it here and there into dissolving tatters. I mounted the steps to the mouth of the Pit, while Joyce waded out in the rising pond, with the two men we had to spare, and, toiling bravely with crowbars and ropes, they presently succeeded in removing the largest of the impeding rocks. With a swift, gliding movement, the water swirled forward, and then sucked noisily away.

It was glorious up there in the teeth of that cool, fleet air. The Hat looked utterly desolate; the sky grandly wild. It made me homesick to see the distant trees bend down, and hear the whistling rush of the wind.

I had turned about and gazed idly at the fugitive clouds, when suddenly the sharp report of a pistol reached my ears. I glanced helplessly

in the direction of the shot, and then strained my eyes, but the twilight was fading rapidly, and only the outline of the swaying trees showed black against the blacker sky. Quickly there came a flash of light and another report; then a third — a fourth; and when, dashing into the hut, I had seized my pistol and run at the top of my speed across the Hat, a rapid exchange of shots rang out on the air, and then all was still.

You may recall that there were but two easy descents from the Hat, one by the wagon-road along the southern face, and the other by a narrow path leading at a comfortable slope through the woods on the western side. It was towards this latter point that I ran, suspecting, of course, that our men under "Bob" had gotten into a fracas with the scouts, and feeling that if such were the case it would be most unfortunate, now that the necessity of preserving our well a secret was almost over.

Just as I reached the timber, a bullet, flashing from a pistol about fifty yards in front of me, cut rustling through the leaves at my side, and I sprang behind a tree, uncertain what to do. Perhaps it was one of our men who mistook me for an intruder.

"Dick!" I called. "Holloa, Dick! Is that you?" There came as reply another bullet, which imbedded itself in the tree. Stooping, I peered through the bushes and saw, not eighty feet away, two figures running swiftly down the road.

"Who are you?" I shouted again. "Stop, or I'll shoot!"

A loud oath, and as I stood erect in full view, a third report rang out and a bullet pierced my hat. The savage desperation of this act decided me.

My assailants, in rushing past me, had now come almost abreast of me. I took deliberate aim at the nearer form, when a flutter of garments about it stayed my finger; a light shriek of terror caused me to drop my arm — and at that instant the whole heavens seemed to burst open and belch forth flame. Every object around me was revealed as plain as under the noonday sun, and in the road before me were the two fugitives; one, a tall man in great boots, holding upward in his left hand a pistol, while his right arm passed round the waist of a woman enveloped in a rubber coat. Her face was turned full towards me, and on it was a look of such wild terror as I

have never seen before or since — it was the face of the elder of the women I had seen the day before riding with Schlau Burns. Then, as the black curtain of night fell suddenly as it had been lifted, came the appalling shock of the thunderbolt, smiting the earth with a deafening crash, and leaping away in thunderous peals like ten thousand successive explosions, until at last, with a dying boom, it died away in sullen reverberations. A soft light sifting through the pines fell about me, and, looking up, I saw the radiant face of the harvest moon.

The phenomenon was awful, coming so unexpectedly, when the storm seemed to have spent its fury, and the moon and the stars were peeping. I was dazed. And this woman — the mother of Miss Petrice — on what errand could she be? — and in whose company? The reaction from the excitement and shock left me quite unnerved, and I leaned against the tree, wondering at the strange episode, when there arose again the sound of footsteps on the road, and I saw several men approaching on a run. As they drew near I called on them to halt.

"Who are you?" I cried. They started back.

"Is that you, Mr. Ogden?" It was the familiar voice of Tim. Springing into the road, I seized him by the hand.

"What does all this mean?" I asked.

"Nothin' much. We've only been havin' a set-to with some gawks that was pryin' about the Hat. Did any of 'em pass here? I heard some firin'."

"Yes," I answered, evasively; "a man went by."

"*A* man! On'y one?"

"That is all — and quite enough. Two like him would have been the death of me. As it is, he has left a hole through my hat. But tell me — how have you succeeded?"

"All right. If you've no objections, though, I'd ruther hunt up Mr. Selden, so's I'll on'y have to tell the story once. It'll save time."

"You see," he said, as we stepped briskly through the wet grass, "there wasn't any partic'lar reason why this here rumpus should've been, on'y I hate a lean-lookin' sneak that thinks he knows everything when the fact is he don't know oil from molasses; and we had to be quits, you know." I really knew nothing of the kind, but, as I felt it would do no good to say so, I

simply accepted his complacent proposition in silence.

Joyce was standing at the mouth of the Pit in the noisy flare of the gas. When his eyes fell on Tim, he hurried forward, and asked hoarsely,—

"Well?"

CHAPTER IX.

FROSCH. — Only wait a moment —
In the twinkle of a bumper I will tell you —
I'll worm it out of them as easily
As draw an infant's tooth. —
— GOETHE'S *Faust.*

WHEN Tim went into the telegraph office at Sandhole, he brushed past several men who were loitering outside in the sun. One of these was Tickly-Bender. Within, a brisk young man, much too stylish of dress to become such rude quarters, sat before the telegraph instrument, and gazed very keenly, albeit he did so through half-closed eyes, at Tim, who wrote out his despatch in stiff, angular characters.

The young man, first looking it over, then darted a penetrating glance at Tim, and read it aloud.

"'Get plenty of nails — O. S.'?" said he, in a tone of inquiry. "Why, what's this?"

"Nails," answered Tim, in a deep bass voice. "Just nails, young feller."

"So I see; but I don't understand" —

"Can't you telegraph *nails?*" Tim demanded.

"N-a-l-e-s, nails. That's all *you* want to understand, young feller."

"Nails — to drive in, eh! Certainly, certainly, beg pardon," exclaimed the young man, hastily, his keen eyes wide open now. "You see," he added, "I couldn't make out who wanted plenty of nails in Sandhole; thought there was kegs of 'em in town." And he beat a swift tattoo on the paper with his pencil, counting the number of words.

"Quarter, please," he said, remarking with a feeble yawn and a grin, — "Hardware business pay now?"

Tim was too busy with his purse to reply. He laid the required piece of silver on the table, and turned his tanned face to the operator.

"If any answer comes, I'm at the 'Bullwheel.'"

"Right," said the young man, surveying him again with half-closed eyes and the same grin. As though it transfixed him, Tim paused for an instant returning the gaze with a saturnine frown, and then passed out. Tickly-Bender had been a witness of this scene, and Tim, seeing him at the door with a question in his eyes that was forming on his lips, nipped its expression in the bud by inviting him over to the "Bullwheel." As they

crossed the road, he glanced up at the second story of the frame house adjoining the hotel. It was the office, as a great sign announced, of the *Spouter;* but Tim looked in vain for a glimpse of its editor.

"I'd a mind to come up and see you to-day," said Tickly-Bender, when they stood at the bar.

"Why didn't ye?"

"Well, I kind o' thought I wouldn't be welcome, you're so dast busy — at the hotel, I mean," added Tickly, with a knowing wink.

Tim solemnly clinked his glass against Tickly's, drank slowly, and said: —

"Yes, we're busy; but you'd 'a' been welcome."

"In the Pit?" Tickly asked this in a whisper, first glancing cautiously around to see that no one could overhear. But Tim looked calmly at him, and answered in his natural voice, perhaps raised a trifle higher: —

"Of course in the Pit, if you'd 'a' wished; but what 'd ye want down there? You'd 'a' found us at the hotel."

"I ain't much of a scout, Tim," said Tickly, bringing his fist down on the top of the bar, in an argumentative way; "but dast if I'm a fool.

'Nails!'" said he, with bitter irony of tone, "an' 'plenty of 'em!' Why, what d'ye think I am?"

"Blame if I can make out 'xactly," laughed Tim, "*what* ye are. But you're talkin' unusually queer to-day, Tickly. Mebbe it's drink."

Tickly scoffed the suggestion with an oath. "Barkeep," said he, "more rum."

"With me," added a suave voice; and Major Dibbs stepped between them, arrayed in his close-fitting frock coat and high silk hat, the skin of his smooth face stretched tight by a benign smile. "With me," he placidly repeated, "by all means."

That a man of the Major's presence and importance should *insist* upon "standing treat" was a condescension that Tickly plainly regarded it as his duty not to frustrate. So the glasses were filled at the Major's expense; and Schlau, nonchalant and smiling, coming in at this interesting juncture, joined the group, and drank also.

The Major, indeed, was astonishingly dry; he was for drinking certain cold mixtures as fast as they could be compounded, maintaining the while the full burden of the conversation with consummate ease and grace. But he drew breath, at length, when a boy came to the door and called out:—

"Telegram for 'O. S.'!"

"Mine," said Tim, quietly. He opened it, read its brief message with apparent apathy, thrust it into his pocket, and, turning an inscrutable countenance to the Major, resumed his attitude of patient audience. But the thread of the Major's talk was snapped. He touched Schlau on the shoulder, and drew his arm through Tim's, saying: —

"My dear Tickly, I know you'll excuse us while we fulfil an engagement"—and with true military skill manœuvred his men out of the "Bullwheel."

"Let us go," said he, with vivacity, to "Sampson's." Tim was willing to go anywhere with his two companions, save to the Devil's Hat; he was at Sandhole for the purpose of keeping them away from such mischief.

Like an adroit draughtsman, the sun was drawing his lines of light along the clearing, until they now lay in very acute angles on the bare board roofs of the outlying shanties of Sandhole. These shanties were assembled in most irregular fashion: back to back, vis-à-vis, front to side, close together, or at distances of fifty feet apart; and on some of them the only

sign of paint was a sign of trade; as one, bearing the odd combination, — "Bakery — Shoes Mended — & Mackerel." The religious element of the town had put up a church. It looked like a colossal Saratoga trunk, was painted white, and surmounted by a small belfry, painted green, which but partially shielded a huge bell. It was a notorious misfit. The bell was meant for a structure thrice the size of the Sandhole M. E. Church; but when the need of one was made known, the generous citizens of the town had responded so liberally to the call that a sum of money was realized much more than sufficient for the purpose. However, the committee appointed to make the purchase, being composed of wildcatters, all men of wide views, sent a check for the full amount to the foundry, requesting the instant expedition of the largest bell it would buy. Next the church arose a tall derrick, and, approaching it from the opposite side, it had the appearance of the scaffolding of a steeple, weather-worn and ugly. Confronting the church, across the way, was Wah Ling's laundry. When Sandhole needed relaxation from an unusual pressure of excitement or gin, it repaired in hilarious condition to Wah Ling's

modest establishment, carrying terror and confusion before it. And it was along this thoroughfare, which stretched ahead unfenced, but clearly defined, like an angry daub of a brush dipped in yellow ochre, that Tim walked with Schlau and Major Dibbs, at times through dust ankle-deep. The open ground about had altogether a jaundiced complexion. First, sloping steeply down from the woods, it bore a colony of round red tanks on its bosom, and away off, on either hand, bristled hosts of derricks on the hill-side. But here, where Sandhole clustered about the narrow, muddy stream, there was scarcely a rock, a stump, or a blade of grass left uncrushed by the tramping activities of the town. Within gunshot, however, of the last rude house properly embraced in the limits of the settlement stood an isolated dwelling, beneath the branches of an isolated tree. This was "Sampson's."

The Major had been talking incessantly. He was brimful of gayety; he bubbled over into anecdote and reminiscence.

"Few men, Mr. Paxson," said he, "have had my experience in the oil-country. Few men would want it. But it has cost me considerable

time and money; hence I prize it. From my first visit to the Drake well down to my connection with Porcupine No. 8 — but just take Porcupine No. 8 as an example," — and he did so, detailing the story, until, glancing up, he suddenly broke off in the midst of it, saying: —

"But another time — Sampson, my dear fellow, have you any visitors?"

A short, burly man, with dark, matted hair and a long, bushy, black beard, stood rubbing the back of one hand in the palm of the other, on the small veranda of the isolated shanty. He smiled, and bowed obsequiously.

"No, Major, no; the room is empty. Walk in, gentlemen; walk in."

An unobtrusive sign declared that Sampson's was a grocery-store; and in confirmation of the statement there were divers hardware implements on the porch, and boxes and barrels filled with vegetables. Within, likewise, arrayed on both sides of the front room, there were multitudinous proofs, from hams to spools of cotton, of the genuineness of Sampson's vocation. There was another apartment, directly back of this one, smaller, ill-lighted by gas, and furnished simply with a half-dozen chairs, two tables, and an

oblong, coffin-like box or locker, resting innocently in an angle of the room. This was Sampson's "parlor," and into it he now ushered his three guests; pausing at the door, with his hand on the knob and an apologetic look on his face. The Major had advanced to the light, and extracted from his pocket a handful of coin. Selecting a silver dollar, he came smiling back, and said, with outstretched hands: —

"Sampson, shake."

The groceryman, who had been staring in an absent way at the floor, raised his matted head at the call, and gazed for an instant with an expression of surprise and mild expostulation at the proffered hand. Then, fervently grasping it, he looked into the Major's face with a beaming smile, and vanished, closing the door behind him.

To Tim, who had viewed this strange proceeding in open-mouthed wonder, the Major now turned with the brief explanation: —

"Sampson, Mr. Paxson, has no license."

Meanwhile, Schlau had stepped to the locker and thrown back its lid, revealing a long double row of bottles and fat, short jugs.

"At your disposal, Mr. Paxson," said the Major, comprehending the display in a look and

graceful wave of his right arm. "The first jug is Sampson's best."

From this jug, then, Tim drew a long inspiration; ungluing his lips, at length, with a wry face.

"D'ye call that his 'best'?" he demanded.

"Take the gifts the gods provide thee, Mr. Paxson," said the Major, cheerfully, seizing the jug. "You'll find 'Sampson's best' improves with practice. Success to the hotel, Mr. Paxson."

The Major's greenish eyes twinkled down at Tim on either side the jug.

"Success," he repeated, passing the "best" to Schlau; "success, I say, to the Devil's Hat Hotel — to all enterprises engaged in on the Devil's Hat."

Tim, hoisting his feet upon the pine table, nodded a careless acknowledgment.

"Let us try some of that cherry brandy, Mr. Burns," said the Major, moving again upon the locker.

"You'll find it more palatable than the whiskey, Mr. Paxson, I'm sure."

"Not so swift," chuckled Tim. "Lemme commit suicide slow, Major Dibbs. The 'best'

druv one nail in me coffin; just wait a while, will ye, and then I'll try some of Sampson's worst."

"With pleasure," said the Major, raising the cherry brandy aloft. His long white throat was bared towards Tim, and it worked as from swallowing; but not so to the eye of such a keen observer as Tim, who saw something so amusing in the motions of the Major that he smeared his rough, black hand down over his face to smooth out a smile that began to play on it. Nor did this movement escape the notice of Major Dibbs. He set the cherry brandy on the table with rather a baffled look, and dropped into a chair facing the driller.

"You are wise, Mr. Paxson," he said. "You like to drink gently — not absorb your liquor in the manner of a blotting-pad. But few men can be so prudent; you are to be envied."

There followed quite an interval of silence, broken at length by Schlau, who, fidgeting about in his chair, said to Tim: —

"Had you been waiting a long time for your telegram before we came?"

"No, on'y a few minutes."

Schlau's words seemed to awaken the Major

from a sleep. The skin stretched tight over his cheek-bones again, and his eyes brightened.

"Come, Mr. Paxson," said he, "let us be done with formality; let me call you Tim, won't you?"

"If it give you joy," said the driller, "peg away. Tim, or Paxson, it's one to me — the same cheese, on'y out of a dif'rent box."

"Bravo!" cried the Major, laughing immoderately. "Well put, Tim. You talk like a poet, with your proverbs. But, come, another pull at the jug before I pay you back in your own coin."

Nothing loath, Tim had a long pull, Schlau a strong pull, and the three a pull all together, at the cherry brandy.

"Now, observe, Tim," said the Major, in a calm, confidential tone, as though all "formality" had indeed been thrown aside between them, "observe that I am very fond of proverbs myself. There is one in particular that I have always admired from boyhood, — 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.' Perhaps you have heard it before?"

"Many a time."

"How do you like it?"

"Good enough," said Tim, thoughtfully. "But,

in this here identical case, seems to me one ole bird on the ground is worth two ole owls 'up a tree.'"

"Ha, ha!" shouted the Major dismally.

The door flew open, and Sampson's shaggy head darted in like a jack-in-the-box.

"Did you call, Major?" said he, with the same humble, compliant look. Already Major Dibbs had risen to his feet and thrust his hands into his pockets. It was not necessary to reply to Sampson's question with words. The language current with him was metallic.

"Here Sampson," said the Major, resurrecting some coin; "shake."

Again the look of mild expostulation and surprise, the fervent hand-shake, the beaming smile; and he vanished as before.

"Now, Tim," resumed the Major, as though the concession was painfully wrung from him, "there's no use talking, you fellows have certainly managed this affair very cleverly — wonderfully so — you especially. Oh, come! Tim," he continued irritably, as the driller eyed him with immovable features, "don't play the Sphinx any more. I may as well be plain with you. If you'll tell us just how far you've drilled, and

keep us posted, we three will share the spoils among us."

He uttered the last words in a persuasive voice, and leaned eagerly towards Tim, who listened through the proposal with becoming gravity.

"Why," said he, "this here cert'nly beats fits. You're the most suspicious ole owl I ever seen up any tree. Can't a man build a hotel hereabout, an' rig a hydraulic ram for his water-supply, without bein' took for a wild-catter?"

"Oh, humbug, Tim!" said Schlau, impatiently. "Give us credit for a little sense, any way. I suppose you'll say that telegram's got something to do with the hydraulic ram, or the hotel?"

"Yes, sir, I will."

Schlau shrugged his shoulders, and looked vexed. The Major rested both elbows on the table, his head in his hands, and his eyes on Tim.

"Prove it," he urged.

"You owls are outrageous curious," said Tim, with provoking coolness. "But lemme ask you somethin'. What kind of a shop would ye go to

most if ye were puttin' up a hotel? A hardware shop, wouldn't ye?"

"Perhaps," said the Major.

"No p'r'aps 'bout it; ye'd have to go. Well, nails is hardware, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, look ye here, then," said Tim, with a triumphant grin, taking the telegram from his pocket, and exhibiting it with his thumb placed over the name of Bedford — "'*Have plenty of nails*' — what's that? is it hardware, or ain't it?"

The Major sprang to his feet, and turned an inquiring look upon Schlau.

"You know best what it is, Tim," said he. "Tell us; it'll pay you."

"Why, nails," retorted Tim; "ye can't put a hotel up without 'em. D'ye think we used hair-pins?"

But as he gazed quizzically into the Major's face, Schlau inclined his head, and cast a quick, searching glance at the telegram. Then he rose with a light laugh, and took up his hat.

"That settles it," said he to the Major. "Bedford is not in the hardware business. He doesn't broke in nails, Tim."

At the sound of shuffling chairs the door burst open, and admitted once more the head of Mr. Sampson with its perennial expression of humility. This time, however, the Major did not invite him to "shake hands," but, brushing rudely by, strode forth into the gathering darkness.

CHAPTER X.

> — Whose combustible
> And fuelled entrails thence conceiving fire,
> Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds,
> And leave a singed bottom all involved
> With stench and smoke. — *Milton.*

Tim, having lighted his pipe, half emptied a flask of liquor, and fastened his gaze on the muzzle of a shotgun that stood in the corner of my room, — as though this visual focus enabled him to mobilize his thoughts, — had told us, in different words, the foregoing story of his trip to Sandhole, in a drawling monotone that was habitual with him.

Joyce cared to hear no more. His face glowed.

"Tim," he said, vehemently, "you'll find a whole nest of birds in your hand."

But I besought him to hear Tim out, who, a little nettled to be disposed of so quickly, had fallen back in his chair, puffing gloomily at his pipe. Revived, however, by another draught from the flask, he gazed a little more severely at the shotgun, and resumed: —

"When Dibbs flew out the door, I shook hands with Sampson on me own hook. Then I thought it was about time to go; and, after a while, Schlau and me set off together towards the Hat. Then that storm came on, and we stood it out under a big tree in the woods. I left him at the wagon-road, and he says — 'I guess I know all about it now, Tim, and you've done this better 'n anything I ever saw in the oil-country, and I was at Pithole, too. Tell Mr. Selden and Ogden that I congratulate 'em, and hope they've made a big pile, for they deserve it.' — Well, I had jus' got on top the Hat, and was passin' round the hotel, when I heard them pistol-shots over by the woods. Thinks I, at once, it's Dibbs; for when he left Sampson's I had a sneakin' idea he was bound for the Hat. So I run round close by the trees, mad as a hornet, for there's no love lost 'twixt him and me, and who should I come plump up against, there by the big pine, but Bob. — 'My God!' says he, 'Mister Paxson, is it you?' and bust out cryin'. — 'What's up?' says I, thinkin' mebbe somethin' bad had happened in the Pit. 'Why,' says he, 'I thought you was Tickly-Bender, and pulled the trigger twice at you as you come runnin' 'mong the trees. Thank God,

the caps was wet!' — 'Tickly-Bender?' says I; 'are you sure it's Tickly-Bender?' — 'Didn't I see him by the moon,' says he, 'with two others, when Dick fired at 'em, no further 'n from here to the hotel?' — Then come that quick firin' you heard over 'n the woods between our fellows and the 'shiners. It didn't last long. One of the 'shiners were winged, and when I got there they had jumped and tumbled down the rocks and was runnin' across the level, the lame one a-leanin' on the other two. We could have pinned 'em easy, but I saw no use, and told the men to hold up."

Tim paused, leaving me sadly bewildered. Had he seen Mrs. Corliss? If so, did he know her? I secretly hoped in the negative, for I was resolved not to mention her name. It would be hard for me to say why I had formed this resolution. Indeed, the feeling that determined me was so vague that I will not attempt to explain it to you.

Joyce leaned smilingly forward and said to Tim: — "So Dibbs had not paid us a visit, after all?"

"Yes, he had. I heard some one runnin' along the road, and Bob, who was on ahead, says he saw 'em plain — a man and a woman."

"A woman?"

"Yes — in a gossamer; and the man was Dibbs. Soon 's he told me, I started to follow 'em down the path. Then we heard shootin' in front — then the flash of lightnin' come — and then I met Mr. Ogden."

"Perhaps Bob was mistaken, Tim," said I, shaking my head at Joyce in discredit of the tale; "about the woman, any way. But, supposing it to have been the Major, I think we had better bury the matter right here. We have no reason now to feel sore towards these people —"

I stopped short, for a muffled, far-off roar reached our ears; the glass rattled in the windows, and the earth shivered as if chilled. Outside the cabin, we found the men in a group, staring at the southern sky, now stained a scarlet glory as rich as the warmest afterglow of a sunset. Just above the trees leaped many tongues of flame, coloring the edges of the flying clouds, upon which shone the soft silver light of the full moon. While we looked, the coppery blush in the sky heightened suddenly into the hue of burnished brass, a fountain of flame sprang out from the woods with a circling spray of sparks, and a second detonation smote the air.

"Tanks," said Tim, laconically.

"How long has it been burning?" I asked the men.

"Ever since you went in," one of them replied. "I saw the light before, but thought it was some fresh gas-pipes sunk."

"Tanks," repeated Tim, firmly. "Mebbe set on fire by that lightnin' stroke."

It was a grand spectacle, at any rate, and, from our elevated point of view, we could see the great illumination at its best. Evidently, the fire was increasing in scope and fury, for the clouds took on a blood-red tint, quite subduing the mellow radiance of the moon; and the reflection of the flame had so overspread the heavens that the Hat lay black beneath a canopy of pink.

"Who's this?" said Tim, suddenly, pointing towards a form that approached us rapidly through the darkness, and soon stood revealed in the gas as Schlau Burns, covered with mud.

"Have you got any dry powder, Mr. Ogden?" he panted. "Give me all you can spare, for God's sake! The lightning's struck the company's tanks on the hill. It's spreading. Two tanks have gone up already, and five men are burnt to death. The powder's all wet; and, if we

aren't quick, the oil will flow down and burn up the town. See!"

A great sheet of flame shot upward, followed by a third explosion.

"Hurry, for God's sake!" he said, "or we may be too late."

I directed one of the men to bring instantly what little supply of powder we had in the storehouse, and announced my intention of returning with Schlau to the scene of the disaster. As I did so, Joyce drew me aside.

"I guess it's all right," he said, anxiously. "I mean that I suppose Schlau has no design against the Hat. What do you think?" I started back.

"Of course not. You surely can't suspect him?"

"Oh, no; only the thing certainly is open to suspicion. Getting all our powder, you know. However, I've kept back some, and will stay here a while yet in order to be on the safe side. But you should go along with him. It's to our interest the fire should be put out. If it isn't, and much oil is consumed, there may be a rise in certificates, that will altogether offset the drop we have calculated upon."

Oh, how sorry I was to hear him say this — to see him standing there before me with excited looks, and know the ignoble cause of his anxiety — all oblivious of the lives that were in danger — forgetful of everything save his own imperilled dollars and cents! I looked at him sorrowfully, wrathfully, and hot words arose to my lips, but Schlau, tapping me on the shoulder, said, impatiently: —

"If you are going, come; there is no time to lose."

So I turned away, casting from me, as an infected garment, all the confidence I had ever reposed in Joyce Selden.

As we hurried across the level, I cast a backward glance at the Hat. Where the reflection lay upon its southern face it looked like a great, live coal, and the circle of gas-jets at the mouth of the Pit shone like a miniature halo. When we reached the woods, Schlau ran forward, easily finding his way among the trees; I followed blindly after; and Bob brought up the rear, with the powder. Thus we gradually lowered to the level of the fire: and meanwhile the tree-tops were blackest silhouettes against the splendor of the sky. As I half stumbled

and leaped down a steep embankment that let us upon the corduroy road, the flaming light dropped suddenly and dazzlingly, disclosing to our view, through the pines and fantastic network of interlaced underbrush, what seemed the raging fires of hell itself. At this juncture, a dull report sounded.

"Listen!" said Schlau. "They've got powder. It sounds over by '53.' Come this way."

It was as if the doors of a white-hot furnace had flared in my face. Blinded to objects about me, I clutched Schlau's arm, and followed him with averted eyes along the road. As I became tolerant of the glare, I shot hasty glances below. Presently I could discern dusky forms moving about in the powerful light, like flies crawling over the outer surface of a lamp-shade. The hissing rush of the flames, as they licked the air, mingled dolefully with the rustling of the wind through the trees; and at times a sudden gust caught the mounting tongues of fire and swayed them with the noise of a switch cutting the air. We halted, and, still fascinated by the conflagration, I had only a confused sense of voices near me, until Schlau wrenched his arm from my grasp, and said hastily:—

"S'pose you stay here with Miss Petrice, and let Bob come with me," and, without saying more, he darted off. Miss Petrice? I wheeled around, but, dazed by the light, saw nothing, of course, save the darkness. I was moving away when a laughing voice, almost at my elbow, arrested me.

"Mr. Ogden," it said, in a tone of playful chiding, "you are not nearly so gallant as you were this morning."

I recognized the voice at once, and raised my hat towards it.

"Miss Corliss," said I, "pardon me. I do not see you, but I am making my salaam nevertheless."

"You are doing nothing of the kind, sir," she laughed. "You are apparently engaged in fetich-worship before a tree. No, you are not right yet, — you are rendering homage to Major Dibbs and mamma — why, no, you aren't; they have disappeared —" and her voice was full of surprise.

"Be careful, sir," she added, as I now bowed low towards the spot where I felt sure she was. "You are an incorrigible heathen. No, no; you are now crooking the pregnant hinges of your knees

to my horse Tom." — I made this discovery on my own account, for, as my extended hand came in contact with the skin of the beast, a leg shot out towards me, and I was near being maimed for my courtesy. But I now distinguished the outlines of her form in the carriage.

"I shall not take my eyes off you," said I, "for fear of losing you."

"But you are meanwhile missing the fire. Isn't it grand? Yet, I suppose, you have seen so many of them, you don't care. It's my first."

"Mine, too." I said this with needless haste. To tell the truth, I felt rather anxious to have this young lady classify me correctly; that is, I did not wish her to esteem me as an oil-scout or a wildcatter.

"Indeed! Why, I thought you knew all about these things, from what Schlau told me this evening. Wasn't it kind of him to bring me here! I was left at home, with only the girl and those horrid drillers, until he came back. But we met the Major escorting mamma home, and took them in."

The habits of this family were refreshingly free and easy.

"You see, Major Dibbs —"

"Do you ask for me, Miss Petrice?" called a sleek, familiar voice from the road.

"Yes, sir, I do. Where have you gone with my mother?"

"The Major was good enough to take me around the hill to a vantage-ground, dear." This was said in a mild, apologetic tone, and I could see the form of the speaker approaching the other side of the carriage.

"Mamma," said the daughter, "please drop one of your best courtesies across the dasher. This is Mr. Ogden, who rescued me from a watery grave this morning. Major, you and Mr. Ogden have met before?"

"I'm honored to say we have," he answered, with forced unction.

"Please, then, to present Mr. Ogden to me formally," she demanded, laughingly. This was done with considerable flourish by the Major, who thereafter fastened his gaze upon the fire, and relapsed into silence.

We two were chatting pleasantly together when the report of a cannon suddenly snapped the thread of our talk. This was quickly succeeded by a second and a third report, when Miss Petrice leaped to the ground.

"I can't stand it any longer," she declared; "I must see what's going on, with or without Schlau."

"'Maidens, like moths, are ever caught by glare,'" quoted the Major. "Let us go to the top of the hill, where I took your mother. You can see it all there."

We followed him over the road until it ran out of the woods and skirted the brow of the hill that overlooked Sandhole. Here the whole scene burst upon us. Down in the hollow lay the town, its numerous natural-gas jets giving it the appearance of a conflagration, seen from afar. Distant a few hundred yards from it, and at the base of the hill, flowed the creek, on whose unruffled surface lay the silver reflection of the moon. Beginning north of the town, and rising one above the other in terraces, were the oil-tanks, and about midway of the hill arose the terrible nucleus of flame that threatened the destruction of the settlement. Luckily, the wind was blowing westward, bearing most of the heat into the clearing, but at the edge of the woods the topmost branches of the outer trees were charred and burning. Where the fire raged there were five tanks, only three of which were in

flames, and these were all, happily, removed by a distance of several hundred feet from the main colony of tanks, which were arranged close together, like a patch of monstrous mushrooms. Gathered in groups about the fire was the larger part of the population of Sandhole — not at all terror-stricken, but curious, even jocund, for shouts of laughter reached our ears, and snatches of song.

Descending the hill, we turned, and approached the blazing spot with the wind. The three tanks on fire, "61," "62," and "63," lay with a fourth, "64," in a straight line, but the fifth, and all-important one, "65," stood a rod or more farther down the hill. Around the windward side of it a great crowd of people had assembled to watch the operation of shooting it with cannon-balls, in order to let the oil escape. This, then, was the key to the situation. If the fifth tank caught fire and exploded, nothing could prevent the spread of the burning oil to the colony of tanks below, and Sandhole would be swept from the face of the earth.

"Will the loss of oil be very serious?" Petrice asked.

We were now standing at a little distance

from the crowd, surveying the three magnificent tapers that were waving in mid-air.

"A mere trifle," said the Major, "if the fire is confined to its present limits."

He and Mrs. Corliss stood behind us, and I had forgotten their presence, in my rapt contemplation of the unique spectacle before me. I now turned and looked at them. The light was shining full upon their faces, and I fancied that both uneasily refrained from returning my gaze. I could not forbear saying, with pardonable malice: —

"How comes it, Major, that you have never *openly* honored us with a second visit to the Hat?"

What was it in this woman's face that seemed familiar to me? It was more than the look of terror that crossed it at my words — the same look that I had seen when the lightning-flash, which wrought the ruin before us, had revealed her to me on the Hat. And she looked so miserable, I was sorry I had made her so.

"Perhaps," retorted the Major, with a harsh laugh, "it is just as well that I did not look in upon you. I am said by some of my friends to have the blighting gift of the evil-eye, and one of my *jettura* might have brought misfortune upon you."

"The real misfortune," said Petrice, "lies in the name of the place. I knew very well that you would never get timid people to sleep in a hotel perched upon the 'Devil's Hat.'"

As I turned to reply to her, I saw Joyce standing just beyond, his hat in his hand. He was not looking at me or the Major.

"See," said I, "another moth who could not resist the attraction of the light."

He then glanced at me in astonishment.

"Is it you, Ogden? I did not see you."

Whom had he seen, I wondered; but, in wheeling about to present him to the ladies, I observed that Mrs. Corliss, in bowing, kept her eyes fixed steadfastly upon the ground, while on Joyce's face there was an expression of great surprise.

"Mrs. Corliss, did you say?" he inquired, in a tone that implied downright disbelief.

"—and daughter," I affirmed. "You and the Major know each other, I believe."

"Yes," he said, confronting the fire with a curious smile. "When you said 'Corliss,' I thought at first I had had the pleasure of making the acquaintance some time ago."

His manner and words mystified me. And the agitation of Mrs. Corliss — what did it mean? A

sudden roar of the cannon, diverting my mind from the incident, centred all my attention again upon the fire, and held it there; until, from a faint sense of some melody hovering in the air, I presently awoke to the consciousness that Joyce was whistling, whistling most sweetly; and the notes fell soft and low as leaves upon the grass.

"Do you remember the 'Lotos-Eaters'?" whispered Petrice. "The —

> "'Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
> Than tired eyelids on tired eyes?'"

I was surprised to have her speak so feelingly to me. Before I could answer, the Major interposed, rudely checking the music: —

"You should exhibit through the country, Mr. Selden, as the 'Human Flute.'"

"And you as the 'Human Brute,'" Joyce retorted hotly, without much wit or reason. I saw the Major start forward, and I quickly thrust myself in his way to prevent a scene. He fell back and laughed. Such idle repartee and bad-feeling as this always jar upon me; and I had my reward when Petrice stepped to my side, and looked gratefully up at me. We then stood in silence watching the flames and the scarlet sky, until Joyce suddenly exclaimed: —

"There's Schlau; do you wish him?"

The Major called, and he joined us at once.

"I've been looking for you," he said. "Come, and see us shoot the tank."

We followed him through the crowd to a spot commanding a good view. The cannon had been directed upon the entire circumference of the tank, shooting into it a girdle of holes, from which were flowing as many streams of petroleum.

"We're just going to fire the last shot into her," Schlau exclaimed, in leaving us to join the group about the cannon.

Higher up the hill, a large party of men were actively digging ditches to control the lighted oil which issued from the reservoirs. Three of these, you will remember, had already exploded, — the first with a loss of five lives, — and were now only harmless furnaces burning their own precious fuel at a white heat. But the fourth, "64," was smoking in a threatening manner, under the intense heat, that scorched and blistered its red paint.

A loud detonation, almost at our feet; and, glancing towards the huge iron vessel, we saw, as the space in front cleared of smoke, another

gap, nearer the ground, in "65," from which poured still another stream of oil. The tank was fast emptying, and a great shout arose from the jubilant crowd. The cannon was then dragged forward, and brought to bear upon "64." I wondered that this had not been done earlier, and asked the reason of Schlau as he passed by hatless and coatless, looking very heroic with the reflection of the flame on his grimy, sunburnt face.

"I don't know," he said. "I told them we had better attend to it first, but the superintendent thought not; and now we're nearly out of powder."

They had not yet gotten the cannon into position, and we were viewing their movements with bated breath; when, suddenly as the flash of that thunderbolt, the awful explosion occurred, and the great lid of the tank lifted, with a terrific report, scattering the hot oil round, and even upon many people.

Then came the frightful stampede, in which some were trodden under foot and left to a horrible fate, as the fresh-fed flames roared brilliantly heavenward. Fortunately, we had only to sustain the shock and crush of those fleeing from around the cannon; and as Petrice

flung herself with a little cry upon me, I caught her up and made my way quickly as possible towards the road. Near the edge of the woods I paused, out of breath.

"There is nothing to fear now," I panted, rather proud of the quasi-heroic part I had just played. But, glancing at the pretty head, that rested so limply on my shoulder, I saw that the lips were parted, and Petrice was in another faint. In my perplexity, I looked helplessly around, utterly unequal to the occasion. I do not know what I should have done if, gazing back towards the glowing mass, I had not espied Joyce and Mrs. Corliss swiftly approaching us. She left him like an arrow when I called, and darted to her child with a wild scream, that unnerved me far more than the explosion of the tank.

"Petrice! Petrice, my darling! It's your mother, Petrice! Oh, you've killed her! you've killed her!"

She was rocking the flaxen head on her bosom, and covering the pale face with frantic, tearful kisses, while I knelt down and tried to calm her, when the large, swimming eyes of her daughter opened and gazed into mine with a rapidly

succeeding expression of surprise and shame. The mother saw, and hugged Petrice to her breast, laughing and sobbing hysterically. It was a pretty picture there in the grass; the tinted moon's light on Petrice, and the crimson reflection playing in her unbound hair and on the form of her mother.

There was a crackling sound at my elbow, and, looking up, I saw Joyce heartlessly lighting a cigar. The next instant his voice rang out in gay irony: —

"This way, Major; you have covered our retreat admirably."

I am anxious to bring the experiences of this night to a close, just as I longed, when they were enacting, that the day would end. For it had been too full of incident; I was wearied of it, and craved rest and sleep after all the excitement I had undergone.

Indeed, there is little else to tell. After the explosion, the fire raged more fiercely, of course, but did not spread. We looked anxiously towards "65," and soon saw many people returning from the rout to care for the injured. Bob presently came to us with the grateful news that

Schlau was unhurt, and had rallied the men to combat the flames, which were certainly making no headway. He sent word that he would join us as soon as "65" was out of danger.

The Major was silent and subdued, venturing only pacific replies to Joyce's occasional provocative questions relative to his military title. Petrice said nothing, and her manner towards me was pardonably reserved. At length I told her of the trip we had planned to the burning well at Fifteen's.

"I often go there," she said, with fresh interest. "It is very charming. I think mamma is rather jealous of 'The Mystery.'"

"Who is he?"

"Only the most interesting man I ever knew."

"Indeed? Hasn't he a name?"

"Yes, I believe so. You can call him 'Doctor.'"

"Perhaps," I suggested, "you will consent to make one of our party on Thursday, and introduce me?"

"Perhaps," she said, dubiously; "though I feel as if I had seen enough of the spectacular to-night to satisfy me for the rest of my life."

Mrs. Corliss was all a-tremble and deathly pale,

and it was mainly on her account that I welcomed the return of Schlau. He came blackened from head to foot, and completely fagged out.

"The oil's all out of '65,'" he said, "and some of the men from town will watch the place until morning."

Schlau was a brave fellow; one of the few men always ready for an emergency.

"If it hadn't been for you," burst out Bob, enthusiastically, "there'd been no town nor nothin'."

Schlau only laughed, and walked modestly away for the carriage.

And so we left them. Going towards the Hat, neither of us spoke. I was too full of thoughts that I could not share with Joyce, and I fancy he felt the same way towards me. How replete with incident the day had been. Our striking oil; my meeting with Petrice, and afterwards with Schlau and Dibbs; the storm in the Pit; the battle with the oil-men; that terrific thunderbolt, and the sudden glimpse it had given me of Mrs. Corliss and the Major; Tim's story; and, finally, this conflagration and its consequences. Beyond doubt, it was the most eventful day of my life. And yet I had still to feel its dramatic climax.

For, as we mounted the Hat, and Bob's robust figure stood above us on the level, outlined against the moonlight, and I half turned to take a parting look at the mellowing splendor in the southern sky, now tempered to the roseate hues of an autumn sunrise, Joyce suddenly linked his arm in mine, and rooted me to the spot by asking: —

"Ogden, does this Mrs. Corliss remind you of Ellen Brace?"

CHAPTER XI.

He (Plato) draws for us an inimitable picture of the working lawyer, and of his life of bondage; he shows how this bondage from his youth up has stunted and warped him, and made him small and crooked of soul. — *Matthew Arnold.*

THERE are several reasons for the hasty sketch I gave you of my life while a student in the law-office of the Hon. Hewson Dilster. You already know the all-sufficient one, — that the remembrance of this portion of my career is very painful to me. Whenever I revert to any of the incidents of that selfish, thriftless period, my conscience conjures up the doting figure of my dear old uncle, and, pointing to it, asks me, always with bitter reproach: How did you repay his devotion? What did you ever do to lighten the heavy load he bore for your sake? And, as I have never succeeded in quieting my conscience with a satisfactory reply, this association still remains to me, like the haunting dream to Eugene Aram, the blackest spot in my memory.

But, aside from this, I should like to refrain

entirely from chronicling my experiences while a student of law, because they have become astonishingly repulsive to me in the light of years. In short, I may as well tell you now that my estimate of the worth of law and lawyers is very low indeed. It may be that I was schooled to see only the dark side of the profession; certain it is that I have long since renounced allegiance to it, and can now simply regard it with feelings of disgust. Laws are necessary, of course, but lawyers, I believe, are not, — not even necessary evils. I shall live and die in the belief that, as a professional body, far from furthering the ends of justice, they defeat them.

Among all the many attorneys of the Quaker City, there was none to compare in legal acumen, as the professional cant has it, — or, as an honest man might put it, in fecundity of device, — to the Hon. Hewson Dilster. He rarely lost a case for a client, and this was not so much due to his eloquence as an advocate, or his extensive knowledge of the law, — for, as I told you, he entrusted the preparation of briefs, and most of the actual legal work, to his clerks, — but to his perfect mastery of the art of legal *finesse*, of compromise, of avoiding issue, and of adroitly exacting favors,

by virtue of his powerful political and social influence, from the judiciary. He was forever impressing upon our minds the inestimable value of success — or the appearance of success.

"If you can possibly help it," he often said, "never lose a suit. Arbitrate, compromise, delay, — do anything but injure the prestige of your name among the people as a man who always wins."

I lost respect for him on a certain day when several fellow-students and myself were discussing unfavorably a passage from Stephens, relative to the alleged beauty of "special pleading."

"The gradual abolishment of its practice," observed Collins, — a clever, sincere fellow, whose scrupulous honesty may perhaps account for the indifferent success he has achieved in his profession, — "is, in my opinion, the healthiest improvement ever made in the administration of justice in England. I see, too, they are making efforts to reform the Court of Chancery. Thank God! a Jarndyce - Jarndyce suit would be impossible in the United States."

There was a snort of derisive laughter in the little room behind us. The Hon. Hewson Dilster had overheard our conversation.

"I am afraid you have mistaken your calling, Mr. Collins," he said, swaggering before us, his hands, as usual, in his hip-pockets. "The sentiments you entertain should emanate from the pulpit, instead of the bench or bar. You doubtless lament that the old system of arbitration of disputes, that formerly obtained in this county, has been superseded?"

"I do, indeed, sir," said Collins, boldly.

"Ah? I thought so. It is difficult, then, for me to understand your object in reading law, unless you intend setting up as a reformer. You must know that it is not for us to make laws, or execute them, or even interpret them — but to twist them, and turn them, and force them to fit the interests of our clients. Bear that in mind. And you have an erroneous idea of what your duties as a counsellor-at-law will be, if you do not perceive that your chief end must be to protect and save at any cost the life and property of the man who pays you handsomely for doing it. A lawyer is not a moral philosopher; but I'll tell you, young gentleman, what he has to be in order to succeed — a man who, confronted by a legal question, be the equity or justice involved in it never so patent and

certain, can nevertheless summon from his fund of wit or learning arguments *pro* or *con*.

"This, in a nutshell, is the fruit of his legal attainment; and it will all be made clear to you, as you age and sage. Again, Mr. Collins, if you have any political aspirations, I advise you to renounce them. The legal profession is the recruiting-ground for all enviable places in the service of the State, but if you contemplate entering the race for office, I am sure you will be fatally handicapped by your pseudo-reformatory sentiments, which I sincerely trust, for your sake, are only the harmless and fleeting vagaries of youth."

And the great man stalked back into his cabinet, leaving poor Collins in a completely collapsed condition.

I cannot remember when it was that I first noticed the visits to the office of a middle-aged, medium-sized man, very handsome, were it not for an habitual crafty smile that distorted his lips. He had evidently been consulting Dilster for a long time, since his visits antedated the coming of the oldest student. My attention was at length attracted to him by the strange story that began to circulate among us, of the

business that drew him so often to our office. He was very wealthy, — this went without saying, for otherwise he could by no means have commanded so much of Dilster's valuable time, — and he had acquired his wealth by marriage to a widow prominent in the "Assemblies." Lastly, it was said that Cone, long convinced of his wife's perfidy, was about to take preliminary steps to secure an absolute divorce, and that the woman, whose only child, a daughter, by her first husband, was then being educated abroad, would quietly join her child, and consent to the decree on the ground of desertion, in order to avoid giving publicity to her shame. This was the story; and, as all the transactions were conducted secretly between Cone and Dilster, we never learned more of the details. Joyce alone, acting one day in the capacity of witness, when the woman came heavily veiled to the office to sign some paper, and make final arrangements for her departure abroad, knew more; but this must have been very little indeed, as he assured us.

Days went by, and Cone continued his frequent visits to the office. He and Dilster went out together, and generally came back in a hila-

rious condition; until, one fine afternoon, months after the woman's call, Joyce casually informed us that Cone's divorce had been granted. Dilster, looking very homely and gaudy in his silk waistcoat and high hat, was joined by his companionable client, whose habitual smile was, if possible, a shade more crafty, and the two disappeared for a full week. Joyce alone exhibited no surprise at the sudden flight of our chief, but when we questioned him he only shrugged his shoulders, until, one day, it being suggested to him that perhaps Dilster was acting as best man for Cone, he colored, and said, "Perhaps."

Afterwards we learned that this was the case. Cone had married the daughter of a prominent politician; and subsequent events were of so peculiar a nature that a startling suspicion slowly took form in our minds, — a suspicion that grew with time, but which none of us ever saw fit to voice until the afternoon of the memorable day we were admitted to the bar, when, as a select few of us sat over a bottle of wine at the club, jovially reviewing our student-life and dissecting the character of the Hon. Hewson Dilster, Collins plainly spoke his thoughts.

"Concerning that Cone affair," said he, "I've

about made up my mind that if Mrs. Brace did go wrong, Cone was exceedingly glad of it. Examine the facts. He marries a woman in order to get hold of her money; and he tires of her as soon as he controls one of the means of gratifying his political ambition. So he looks around for the best divorce lawyer in town — Dilster. The divorce is decreed, and that very night Cone marries the daughter of a prominent politician. Six months later, he is elected to Congress; and now comes the news of Dilster's offer of a fat place under the government. What's the inference? I tell you what I make out of it all — simply that Mrs. Cone number one — or Ellen Brace — was entirely innocent. She got into Dilster's toils, and he persuaded her that she was a sinner of the deepest dye because her husband was tired of her. Maybe the woman was indiscreet — we have no proof of that. Her love for her child, and the horror she had of having her honor even questioned before the world, were sufficient reason for a lady of refinement, such as she certainly was, to submit to the less offensive of the two courses open to her, or rather imposed upon her. Who could manage a case like that better than Dilster?"

These words came back to me, and also the remembrance of the day when Mrs. Cone was closeted with Dilster. For, returning then to the office from my lunch, I had seen her face, and looked pityingly into it, so tear-stained and expressive of genuine anguish, as she descended the steps to her carriage.

And now you know why Joyce's simple question was a dramatic climax to that eventful day, and why it rooted me to the earth; for, as he uttered the name of Ellen Brace, the familiar feeling that had crept over me when I gazed upon the features of Mrs. Corliss now suddenly shaped itself into a wavering conviction that the terror-stricken face revealed to me by the lightning flash was the same I had seen so pallid and tear-stained coming from the office of the Hon. Hewson Dilster.

It was such a surprise to me that I stood there speechless, looking Joyce in the face. He was restless, and moved ahead, saying brusquely: —

"You know her, then? You have seen her as Mrs. Brace?"

"Once. But, nonsense!" said I; "how can it be? It is preposterous to suppose that a culti-

vated woman like Mrs. Brace would take to striking oil. She joined her daughter abroad."

"And has doubtless returned from abroad *with* her daughter. But I am at a loss to understand the interest she has in the Major."

To me it was all a riddle.

CHAPTER XII.

There, at the foot of yonder nodding beech,
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.
— GRAY'S *Elegy*.

IT would not interest you to learn in detail the events of the following day. We were very busy, and I was glad for once to have my mind so occupied with pressing practical affairs as to shut out the remembrance of the strange episode of the day before.

I was up with the sun, but long before I awoke Joyce and Tim were stirring about in the Pit; for our well was flowing copiously, and a force of men were engaged in laying pipe from the Hat to the nearest iron tank. The four tanks had quite burned themselves out, and only their smoke, blending into one black, heavy column, arose and discolored the blue sky. With the afternoon came curious visitors from Sandhole to inspect our "gusher," — brokers, wildcatters, and scouts, — all wild with excitement at the news, which

Bedford, it seemed, had widely and timely diffused; and full of astonishment at the sagacity we had displayed in the selection of our site, and the marvellous secrecy we had succeeded in preserving. Of course, I invariably pointed out that all credit was due exclusively to Joyce, and he consequently became the object of the most flattering attention.

Several speculators and producers arrived by the afternoon train, and made us cash offers for the Hat, or part of it, that fairly took my breath away. I strongly favored the acceptance of the most liberal of these, for the sum far exceeded my most sanguine expectations; but Joyce calmly dismissed my advice with a compassionate smile, and I did not urge the matter, thinking that perhaps he was right. This amounted almost to conviction, later in the day, when he sought me out among the large crowd gathered in the Pit, and read me a despatch from Bedford. The unsteady market had dropped much lower than we had calculated, and we were very heavy gainers.

"I have just taken the liberty of promising Thomas, of Sandhole, the contract for sinking us two more wells," said Joyce, as we strolled

towards the rocks. "We can now rest for a time; you can botanize with Miss Petrice, and perhaps some fine day I may take a fancy to renew my acquaintance with Mrs. Brace."

"You are not sure it is she," I remonstrated, quickly; "and, supposing it is, don't you think we had better respect her incognito? It would be outrageous to force the discovery upon her; and, see here, Selden! it's my belief Mrs. Brace suffered enough through the rascality of her husband and old Dilster; let her alone."

I had looked him full in his calm, dark face, suddenly feeling for him such a contempt as you cannot understand or I explain. He raised his eyebrows at me, and laughed softly.

"How wonderfully disinterested we are!" he said. "Ogden, I really believe you are the most ingenuous man, for a lawyer, I ever met. I used to think you feigned it, but I am getting convinced it is part and parcel of your nature." He paused, confronted me impulsively, and continued, in a patronizing tone: —

"Ogden, let me tell you something. If you wish to succeed in this world in a worldly way, you must first believe every man a rascal until he proves himself to be the contrary. Now, you

appear to invert this process in your judgment of men. See how you dropped into this scheme, relying entirely upon my word — never questioning my motives. I would not have told you this if our scheme had collapsed; but I do so now simply for your own good. I mean that the eagerness with which you swallowed that stale old 'belt theory' of Angell's surprised and delighted me. Look at the transaction from a common-sense point of view, can't you?" — he spoke with a querulous eagerness, like a guilty man struggling to vindicate himself, — "how in the world could you ever suppose that, if I were absolutely certain there was oil here, or if I had possessed the money to develop it, — for I tell you plainly I had only five hundred dollars, — I would come to you and deliberately part with half my interest? I honestly think, Ogden, you are old enough to know that in the world of business no man does another a good turn without valuable consideration — if he is wise. So in this matter of ours. I hadn't the money to execute an idea that took possession of me. You had — otherwise I would certainly have left you out in the cold."

These words gave me great relief and satisfac-

tion. I was free to feel towards him as I liked. He had voluntarily removed the sense of obligation that had oppressed me since I lost all confidence in him, the night before.

"You are right," said I, "in assuming that I do not judge every man a rogue until he proves himself to be an honest man; but it is you who invert the natural, the legal, process of holding every man innocent until he be proved guilty. Yes, I am a believer in the efficacy of honesty; if I thought with you, I should be forever arraigning myself as a criminal before the bar of my own conscience" —

"It is very easy to secure an acquittal where one is both prosecuting attorney, judge, and attorney for the defendant," he interrupted, dryly.

"At any rate, I am glad to have you *confess* — shall I say?"

"As you please."

"Confess, then, your dependence upon me for the fruition of our successful venture; and, in turn, I'll admit to you that, by your own instructions, I will slough off a feeling of gratitude under which I have been growing rather restive. You have kindly lifted from my shoulders a load

of indebtedness that I was inclined to carry in your behalf. We are quits, then?"

I thought he looked uneasy to see me so cheerful.

"We are quits," he echoed, and left me.

I felt uncomfortable down in the Pit. The sudden change from our accustomed quiet to the babel of vulgar voices jarred on me. I wanted to be at the Strid, where I might throw myself on the smooth rock and be cooled by the spray of the brook. Perhaps you can enter into my state of feeling, and understand how fatigued in mind and body the rapid occurrences of the past twenty-four hours had left me.

As I turned to leave the Pit, I saw the tall clothespin-like figure of Major Dibbs descending the rocks. He approached me, smiling benignly, and shook my hand with an exaggerated cordiality.

"I have partly come to ask," said he, "if you can find your way to '450' — Mrs. Corliss's — to-morrow?"

"I suppose so, by following Schlau's directions. The first well beyond the bridge, isn't it?"

"Yes. I will not stop for you, then, as I pass by. Secondly, I have come in a journalistic

capacity. I want to publish an account of your astonishing exploit in the *Spouter*. The world should know of it!"

I felt assured it was for neither reason he had come to the Hat. I could not divine his motive; I did not care to. A suspicion flashed across my mind that perhaps he had also observed the mutual recognition of Joyce and Mrs. Corliss. What if he had? I was not in the mood to relish a talk with him, and civilly told him so. There was a foiled look in his face when I hailed Joyce.

"If there be anything that could fill our cup of contentment to overflowing," said he to the Major, with lavish irony, "surely it would be the honor of having our little affair described by the dynamic pen of Editor Dibbs — in whose person, I believe, it has become a puzzling question which is mightier, the pen or the sword."

"I'm afraid, Mr. Selden," suggested the Major, in a winsome tone, "that you are employing that wicked figure of speech known as the hyperbole."

"Exactly! and don't the rhetoricians advocate its praxis in certain kinds of discourse? Such, for instance, as upon ridiculous themes. I think so."

I abruptly left them still engaged in this fatuous tilting of words; both smiling, and apparently enjoying the sport.

I wonder if you have taken the trouble by this time to form an estimate of my moral worth, of my general character. I cannot doubt but that, from the mere fact of my presuming unasked to tell you so much of myself, you have already concluded that I have more than a normal allowance of self-esteem. Perhaps I have. At least, it would be manifest folly for me to attempt to prove the contrary to you. But I am really anxious that in several respects you should judge me correctly.

I am not sordid. I am not lackadaisical. That I engaged so eagerly in this petroleum enterprise, on the one hand, and that I have enthused before you over so many little things, on the other, has doubtless led you to believe that I am both. But I would like you to believe that I am neither. What am I, then?

Here, as I lie stretched out at the Strid, you can see me outwardly, — a young man of medium size, slight build; the features of my face regular, but not noteworthy, the skin smooth and clean-

shaven, — altogether, a commonplace young man. Inwardly, I suppose, I am commonplace, too, only I may tell you that, back of all my habitual reserve, my profound love of ease and introspection, my addiction to Emerson as to a narcotic, there is a potential passion that, called into being, possesses my heart and brain like all the furies.

I can't discuss it with you. I can't persuade you that I am of ripe judgment, since I have confessed to you that I am of unripe years. But I would wish you, throughout the rest of my story, to think of me as one who devoutly despises cant. Who would rather see the earth bare as a copper ball than have it flaunting in borrowed green; the people on it nude, hideous, wretched, rather than clothed in prudery, beautified by cosmetics, or hypocritically happy. Who would have all forms of cant universally regarded as scandalous; all cant in art made impossible by such sweeping social reforms; and all religious cant — by far the greatest quantity — treated as mercilessly as a wolf discovered in sheep's clothing.

For I ask you why should it be necessary for human beings, with some little nobility of nature

left in them after all the degrading over-refinement and cumulative hypocrisies of ages, to remain longer as whited sepulchres in the glare of the laughing sun? To feel it incumbent upon us to act longer this shameful farce, each knowing the other to be a fool and a dissembler, while all the stars look down and laugh at the little creatures frisking about for their amusement in this bootless game of falsehood and chicanery and deceit? I tell you, we do not have to ape the gods in order to be good men; to feel ashamed in order to be modest; to contemplate a future life in order to do justice and our duty in this; to set up for ourselves impracticable goals in order to be inspired to noble deeds. I say, be true, be sincere, be your naked natural self. And if your being falls below the average of purity and worth, don't assume false attributes and talents, don't strive grotesquely to perform acts beyond you, but live on humbly, trying to improve that wherein you are deficient, and no one shall dare treat you with scorn or contempt.

A spirit of reflection, somewhat like this, came over me, as I lay supine on the cool rock at the Strid, while the brook bounded and broke into a largess of spray, sprinkling it upon my forehead.

And from this broad purview I came at length to think of Joyce and the circumstances that had begot my sudden aversion for him — of the Major — of Mrs. Corliss and her daughter. Yes, I own to you I thought a very long time of Petrice. Perhaps it was because she was associated in my mind with the Strid.

Ah! behold the weakness of human flesh! Have I not just declared that above all things we should be sincere? I confess to you I am no great believer in the doctrine of the association of ideas. I will not take refuge behind this thin excuse. Petrice came into my head, I suppose, as other things did; certainly she came as a ray of light; and, since it is natural for one of a sunny temper to dwell upon pleasant thoughts, this may account to you for the long lingering of her image in my mind.

And the sun had sunk, and it was twilight in the west and starlight in the woods, when I left the Strid.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ladies like variegated tulips show;
'Tis to their changes half their charms they owe.
— POPE, *Moral Essays.*

I HAD no difficulty in finding the way to well "450." Leaving the corduroy road at the bridge, I mounted the opposite slope by a path that ran so sharply over the ridge it seemed to lead straight to the sky. Following it, I espied from the summit, a few hundred feet from a creaking derrick, and resting among some great rocks on the hill-side below, a two-story weather-board house, painted white as snow. Set against the beautiful forest greens it was inexpressibly pleasing to my eye, now grown so accustomed to the rough pine dwellings of the oil-men. Everything around it was in tidy keeping. The moss-grown boulders, lately washed by the rain, formed a picturesque natural defence, and a score of yards below it flowed a brook, here dammed up to a considerable breadth, from whose surface the million rays of the sun, falling obliquely

through the tree-tops, were reflected as from a mirror.

Indeed, the unexpected beauty of the place first amused and then abashed me. Everything about it told of the presence of woman; the lace curtains at the little bay-window, the diamond-shaped flower-bed, the cypress-entwined pillars of the porch, which were slender, and fluted, and marble-like — a very small house, but pure and pretty and consistent enough to be set upon the banks of Lago di Como. I might have thought it a mirage but for the tall form of the Major standing upon the porch, and looking down upon Petrice, who hovered about the flower-bed.

I had passed the rocks and was almost at her side before she looked up and smiled me a greeting. She held a tiny pair of scissors in her right hand.

"You have such a knack of stealing upon one unawares!" she said, gently clipping a rose-bud. "I'm not yet certain whether I oughtn't to fear you."

"You see, Ogden," said the Major, "the cunning you have displayed in that wildcat affair will not operate to convince some people that you are absolutely devoid of guile."

Of course there was truth in what he said, but I did not relish his manner of saying it.

"Don't make me regret my good-fortune," I simply answered. Then, turning to Petrice, "It is evident," I continued, "that your conscience pricks you. You sever each bud with a lingering, irresolute clip, as though you regarded yourself a floral butcher."

"Yes, I think I do. You are a keen observer. I have the love of a Granada lady for flowers; and, as I planted these myself, it gives me a pang to mutilate them. Each clip, as you say, is a stab."

"Why, then, do you wound yourself?"

"Why, indeed? I'm not profound enough to tell you. Yet I am sure it is very ungrateful of me to pluck away the sweet children from these beautiful mother-plants after they have budded and blossomed for me. I declare the thought makes me ashamed of myself — that is the last flower I will clip! Now, come upon the porch while I arrange them."

She rose and walked sedately away, her apron full of the fragrant blossoms.

"Your compunction," said the Major, magisterially, "is groundless. Remember that 'Out

of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight' — that is, you know, simply for our pleasure and use."

She paused in her dainty culling of the flowers, and lifted her eyes to his with an impatient gleam in them.

"How do you know that? I don't know it, and will not believe it. No book ever published has the authority to regulate one's love or conception of nature. I pity the person who is narrow enough to view the fields and birds and all of God's beautiful universe through such an irrelevant and misunderstood medium."

She had spoken in a low, firm tone, but her face was flushed. The Major's wore a shocked expression.

"I am not attacking nature," he said.

Petrice smiled.

"I should hope not; you would be indirectly attacking yourself. As the Doctor says: — 'Nature is a law unto herself, not to be measured by any rules devised by man, who is only a part of the great whole.'"

"The Doctor is Sir Oracle, is he?"

"No, the Doctor is only a man who differs from the common run of his sex in this, that

his brains have not made him arrogant; he is not over-proud of the intellect he got by chance; he can still recognize the universal bond existing between himself and a pebble, a bud, or a bee."

"Indeed?" said the Major, provokingly.

Petrice turned suddenly to me.

"Mr. Ogden, don't you dislike people who must live by rules and precepts? I do, cordially; for I've generally found that the ones who back up all their deeds with quotations from Solomon are those whose natural ideas of right and wrong are the most confused and faulty. — Now, Major, you are excoriated enough; let me appease you."

She arose, and adjusted a delicious rose-bud in the upper button-hole of his dusty broadcloth coat.

Her words and manner had so interested me that I was not conscious until now of the presence on the porch of Schlau and Mrs. Corliss. To my great surprise and relief, there was no trace in the latter's face of the pale, emotional woman I had seen before. She was smiling graciously, and seemed perfectly at her ease.

"I would go most gladly," she said, in answer to a question from me, "for I have not yet seen

'The Mystery'; but there are some urgent letters I must attend to. I am sometimes sorry that Schlau ever mentioned this Doctor to Petrice; she has not given me a day's peace since."

Petrice had disappeared within; and Schlau, looking quite handsome and very healthy in his grayish suit and blue-flannel shirt, such as I wore myself, laughed merrily, but said nothing.

"Her visits are not wasted, however," she added, "if Petrice gives a correct report of the conversations between herself and the Doctor. They talk music and philosophy — and French together; besides, she is sketching him, and I suppose I shall have to wait for the portrait before I can see her 'Troglodyte,' as she calls him."

The Major had strolled down to the dam. All around us the birds were trilling, encouraged, no doubt, by Petrice, who in some room above was singing in clear, robust tones the wine-song from "Giroflé-Girofla." Her voice sounded distant at length, until suddenly the dancing melody swelled, and I heard the patter of her feet upon the stairs. Through the narrow hall I caught a glimpse of the little drawing-room, a gayly colored rug on the stained floor, a water-color and several etchings on the walls, the end

of an upright piano, some dried grasses in a thin vase, and the lately cut flowers on the edge of a mahogany centre-table — altogether, a glimpse that was a very delightful contrast to the surroundings.

Then Petrice stood before me, drawing on her gloves, an operation in which I became profoundly interested, for it was one I had not witnessed for a long time. Her head was half buried beneath the great chip hat in which I had first seen her, but the abundance of silky, golden hair could not all be confined, and it straggled out on her white forehead and hung about the graceful neck. Her cheeks were aglow with health, even lightly freckled below the blue eyes, which sparkled as brilliantly as the brooch at her throat. Yet I confess to you that then and often afterwards my gaze lingered upon the red lips, hiding and revealing the shiny white teeth.

"Schlau and the Major are too engrossed in business to be gallant, Mr. Ogden," she said, handing me a large blue-and-white parasol. Nothing but mammon, mammon, mammon; until I am beginning to fear the contagion may catch me. Mamma is already a victim." Her mother's eyes filled at the playful words, and Petrice saw and clasped her impulsively to her breast.

And as I stood there a witness of the pretty tableau, those words of the Major came back to me — "Schlau's black cat and kitten." They were both dressed in half-mourning, and Mrs. Corliss had on a white lace head-dress, that rimmed her dark hair to great advantage. Pointing to this, Petrice said:

"How could you be worldly in that halo!"

"Petrice, darling, hush! Mr. Ogden, I am fearful that the freedom of her life here is making her too free of speech."

I do not know that I am a trustworthy judge of human character, but I felt at this moment that I fairly understoood the temper and worth of this girl. Perhaps by this time I have presented her truthfully enough for you to form your own opinion. But there was a redeeming something in her manner that quite removed her from all the young ladies of her type whom I, and, doubtless, you, have met; a something that made her domineering cleverness seem naïve and charming, at least to me; and a something so subtle that I find I cannot put it into words. I was very happy that morning. At parting, Mrs. Corliss had said a few motherly words of admonition, and you cannot estimate how inspiriting it was for me to

arrogate to myself, however groundlessly, a fraction of the concern she expressed for our safety and timely return. You see, it had been so long since any one had treated me so, that the simple act awakened memories "dear as remembered kisses after death" — of fugitive odors of lilac, honeysuckle, and new-mown hay; of sweet days in the woods, on carpets of yielding moss; of nights on the river — of a wonderful night on the sands, under the soft light of the full moon, when the shadowy boom of a vessel far out on the satin-like surface of the sea was just dipping into the silvery sheen — I could hear the roar of the surf; and then the sonorous tap of a woodpecker; the sounds of many birds and insects; a confusion of old familiar voices — until suddenly, with a start, I became alive to a question repeated petulantly by Petrice.

"Have you ever heard it, Mr. Ogden?"

I had been vaguely conscious that she was talking; but whether to Schlau and the Major, who were just ahead, or to me, I was too absorbed to know. However, rather than confess my inattention, I boldly hazarded the statement: —

"Often!"

She laughed musically.

"There is no mistaking that sepulchral tone or far-away look. Now, I beg of you, don't develop any idiosyncrasy while we are together. But it is my customary luck — I believe I know more eccentric people than any one else in the world! Half my girl friends had marked peculiarities. At Lausanne there was one who used to ask me every day if I didn't think she looked like Madame Récamier, until I told her she was the very picture of Madame de Staël, and almost broke her heart."

"Why, what have I done?"

"You have permitted me to ask you in vain three questions, tell you one anecdote, and squander one excellent pun and numberless pleasantries upon you, without notice. Now let me ask one favor of you, — if you can remain unpreoccupied of mind so long, — please tell me candidly if you are like all the other people about here. I could find out for myself, I suppose, if I chose to wait; but I don't want to. This first symptom is a shock to me."

"Like what people, and in what respect?"

"Why, are you of the oil oily? Did you come here fired simply with the noble resolve to wildcat or die? Is petroleum your highest aspiration?"

"Are you at all serious?"

"Certainly, I am!"

"Then, in the same spirit, let me say that my coming here was purely accidental; that I am not in love with wildcatting or any other speculative business; that I am by profession a lawyer, but that I do not love the law; that I greatly fear I am a trifler in the world; that I have no settled plans, or even views, save certain valueless ones in the impracticable world of sentiment; that, to tell the whole truth, I am somewhat ashamed of my connection with the Devil's Hat affair; and that my ultimate intention, if I have any at all, is presently to realize what falls to me from this venture, and execute a long-cherished desire of travelling indefinitely abroad."

"Very good! Now, for your confidence, I will try you again. While you were so ungallantly communing with your own thoughts, I was speaking of the romantic aspect of petroleum; of these 'dry-holes' which mark, many of them, the graves of buried hopes; and I asked you if you had ever heard the story of well 'No. 5,' sunk over there on the side of that ravine."

"To which I replied?—"

"'Often!'"

"I unwittingly told a lie, and crave your pardon. But won't you heap coals of fire on my head?"

"I'm sorry now I mentioned it, for I can't tell the story as the Doctor does. He has a charm of voice and language all his own, and it gives the story nearly all its interest."

Below us, the brook, because of the recent rain, rushed turgidly through the narrow valley, and swept in a long, muddy curve around the distant bend in the road, which Schlau and the Major, evidently tired of the leisurely pace that we had adopted, were turning with lengthy strides. The sun here shining hotly upon us, Petrice drew closer to me under the shade of the parasol, and, lowering a little the front of the chip hat, began, in a soft, steady voice the following story of well "No. 5."

CHAPTER XIV.

So she, low-toned . . . .
Pale was the perfect face ;
The bosom with long sighs labor'd ; and meek
Seem'd the full lips, and mild the luminous eyes.
— *The Princess.*

When all this region roundabout was as wild as that hill-side, save that the larch and fir and white pine were then free to grow to their stateliest height; when the deer came fearless to drink from the brook, and the snake seldom sounded its warning rattle — that is to say, only three years ago, the gnarled old oak that stands there in the clearing, whose broad branches had sheltered the human form divine in the person of the savage Indian, fluttered its leaves in surprise one day over the venturesome head of the first oil-scout who traversed these forsaken paths.

A New Englander, young and supple, with all the cunning and courage of a Yankee, he had been singled out by those whose interest it was to know the latest operations in the new territory, to watch and and report the developments at the 'Mystery,' then sinking in the ravine beyond.

He was fond of such adventures for the excitement's sake; he received a fixed wage, and was not prompted, therefore, to engage in his work by avarice or malevolence. And, as he reclined in the grateful shade of the oak, panting from the exertion of scaling the steep hill, that sturdy old tree, unbending presently from its first surprise, fell to fanning him with its long, rustling arms, and the birds overhead warbled a tuneful greeting.

It was one of the early days of spring, and, as eveerthing about him seemed overcome by the influence of the indolent air, so the scout, forgetful of duty, lay outstretched beneath the oak, dreaming of the stately elms of New Haven. When he awoke, it was with the hot rays of the sun burning his upturned face; while the lazy wind was wrenching admonitory creaks from the robust branches of the tree — and leaning against its trunk stood a small child, gazing compassionately upon him through violet eyes.

"Oh, you're not dead, are you?" she cried, clasping her hands, and her little bosom palpitating.

"No, indeed. Don't I look alive?"

"You do now, but you didn't when you was so quiet."

This child was a wonderfully interesting thing to the scout. He hadn't talked to one for a year.

"How did you know I wasn't playing 'possum?"

"I never played that. What is it?"

He laughed, and she chimed in like a silver bell; the sweetest sound the scout had heard in a long time.

"Why, to play you're asleep, when you aren't."

She smiled as though she didn't understand, and came and sat down by his side.

"How could you play that all alone? You didn't know I was here, did you?"

The quaint conceit amused them both, and they laughed together again, looking frankly into each other's faces.

"Tell me your name," he urged, taking one of her small hands into his large brown one, and handling it as tenderly as he would a delicate piece of lace.

"My name's Daisy; and I live with mamma and papa over there."

He dropped the hand, and looked at her eagerly.

"Do you know papa? I thought you didn't.

No one ever comes to see us; papa won't let anybody, and mamma is awful afraid. I had a little brother once, but he died last month, and I'm all alone now, and mamma cries whenever I talk about Ossie, so papa won't let me do it any more. But I come here every day and play, and think of Ossie, and oh! I get awful lonely sometimes playin' alone."

"Why do you come here, Daisy?"

"Why, don't you know? Ossie's buried here. You had your head on his grave."

Now the scout made a sudden and very peculiar resolve. Perhaps he was married; any way, he must have been remarkably soft-hearted for a scout. He seized Daisy in his arms, and covered her pretty brown face with kisses. Then he said, very solemnly: —

"Daisy, good-bye. Some day I may come and see you again, but now I must hurry away. Only, Daisy! if your father gets happy soon — that is, I mean, if he — "

"Strikes oil, do you mean?" asked she, precociously.

"Yes," laughed the scout, kissing her again and again, until she wriggled away; "yes, Daisy! if your father strikes oil, and seems very glad

about it, you tell him that you saved him from a scout, will you? But, mind, little one, don't say anything until —"

But at this instant, when little Daisy's violet eyes were wide-open with wonder, and the enthusiastic scout was preparing to take a parting kiss from her cherry lips, two men came from behind the great oak, and, as one snatched Daisy, screaming, to his breast, the other, pointing a pistol at the head of the scout, said, sternly: —

"I could shoot you if I wished; but I've no fondness for homicide. I advise you, however, to follow that man and my daughter without resistance."

And then, in this Indian file, Daisy in front, turning now and then her sorrowful eyes around to meet the tranquil smile of the scout, they skirted the hill, and entered the ravine, passing through a gate in the high board fence which enclosed the derrick and rough structures about the oil-well.

Here the stern-faced owner of the "Mystery" directed several of his men to bind the scout — who calmly submitted to the indignity, for he saw Daisy looking down upon him from a window in the rude shanty — then had his prisoner

thrust into the well-house, and left to the care of the workmen. This altered his mood. So long, it seemed, as he had remained within reach of Daisy's mournful eyes, he had nothing but a cheerful acquiescence for his captors; until the rough oil-men, who knew him, and had heard so much of his cunning and temerity, now laughed in his face, and taunted him with his craven submission. But, left alone, he turned savagely upon them with a torrent of oaths, and shamed and silenced them. Indeed, as the day declined, and only the smoky gas lighted the well-house, he began to regret the weakness that had led him to thrust his neck into such a noose. When, at length, the owner of the well appeared before him, the scout turned to curse aloud, but there was a kindlier look in the man's eye that stayed his tongue. A word to one of the men, and the ropes were loosened from around the ankles of the prisoner.

"Come with me," he said, adding, when they were in the open air: "I did not know, until Daisy just told me, that you had decided to give up watching us, and were going away when I came upon you. I don't understand why you should have done this, and Daisy can't make it

clear, either; but I will give your motive the benefit of the doubt, — that is, I will give you lodging in the kitchen instead of the well-house, and such food as we have, until it is time to let you go."

The scout had no objection to make against this arrangement; he knew, on the contrary, that it would be far more convenient for him to be captured and held by the "Mystery" people than to have returned without information to his employers. So he placidly stretched himself out on the floor of the kitchen.

"Will you let me see Daisy to-morrow?" he asked.

The man frowned at him.

"You see so much of her, you know," said the scout, pleasantly, "and I don't; and, I guess, after this, will never see her again."

"Yes, but I have a right to see her," retorted the other, wonderingly. "We shall see," and he left the room.

And that night the wildcatters along the creek knew something had happened to well "No. 5." There was an explosion of the natural gas at the "Mystery." The frail structures within the fence — derrick, engine, well, and dwelling-house — were all razed to the ground.

Little Daisy, creeping softly from her bed, and stepping noiselessly down the bare stairs, had entered the kitchen, and stood silently, as she had done under the great oak, looking at her big, slumberous friend. Suddenly, as he had awakened upon Ossie's grave, his eyes opened, and he saw her, and laughed.

"I'm awful sorry," she said.

"I ain't, Daisy; I'm glad!"

"Are you, really?"

"Really!"

"Then, I don't care!" She came nearer, and told him, in a confidential whisper, that, in the morning, she would bring him Ossie's books to look at; and then, as the moonlight, coming in at the broken window gave her little white-robed form all the radiance of an angel, she finally said: —

"I must go now; for I didn't tell any one I was coming down to see you — not even mamma. But I am in the little bed in the garret, right up above you; and we can play that we see each other through the floor, until we fall asleep." The purest water distilled on earth had gathered to the eyes of the scout when she bent down and kissed him good-night.

There, then, he lay, dreamily watching the dismal reflection of the gas playing upon the walls and ceiling, and blending luridly with the silver beams of the moon — until, as the house rocked under a terrific explosion, he sprang dizzily to his feet, his blood freezing in his veins. Instantly the room filled with smoke; and, choked and gasping, he grovelled on the floor. There were sounds of stumbling footsteps upon the stairs, — the hysterical shrieks of a woman, — and then the loud cries of the men outside maddened him with a sudden fear, and nerved his heart and limbs.

"Daisy! Daisy!" called the father, flinging wide-open the door of the kitchen.

A current of air swept across the floor, and revived the scout. With one bound he cleared the distance to the stairway door, vainly striving to free his shackled hands.

"I am in — the garret, right above you." He remembered the words, and, with close-set lips and aching lungs, dashed blindly through the blistering smoke and flame, up to the second landing. His bound hands touched a knob, — and the next instant he had sprung into the room, and closed the door behind him.

"Daisy! — little Daisy!"

There was a glad cry at the window, and she ran back to meet him.

"I knew you would come! I knew it! I knew it!"

"Daisy! Daisy! Jump down! We will catch you!" screamed voices from the ground below.

The scout looked out on the black smoke and blazing ruins beneath, and let his eye rest for a moment on the frantic form of the mother.

"Come, Daisy, darling," he said; "kiss me! Now climb upon my back and hold me fast around the neck. There, little one, lean out now, and breathe the air and listen. It's all right!" he shouted, cheerfully, to the crowd below. "I'll bring her safely down; only clear the way."

"Daisy," he said, "promise me you'll make them bury me under the oak, beside Ossie, and that you'll come and visit us both, as before, — will you, darling?"

"O, yes! I'll come every day."

He leaned down, and held his hands over a tongue of fire that shot upward from the window beneath. The cords snapped, and the scout, erecting himself again, seized Daisy's little form

in his strong arms, and knelt in the embrasure of the window.

"Are you afraid, Daisy?" he said, smiling calmly at her.

"O, no!"

"Good-bye, then, darling; and remember."

"I'll remember" — and she reached her lips to his — "Good-bye."

Then he sprang like a panther out beyond the flame and smoke; and when they unwound his loving arms from around the unhurt child, the red reflection of the fire was shining on his smiling face, the moonbeams played like a halo about his head, and the brave soul was swiftly speeding from his crushed and bleeding body.

Presently, Daisy, grown restive under the rapturous embraces of her parents, tripped laughingly away, and knelt by the scout's side.

"Are you playing 'possum?" she asked, gazing quizzically at him.

He shook his head, and strove very hard to speak.

The violet eyes suddenly dimmed, and she leaned over him in alarm.

"Oh! you weren't in earnest! You aren't going away, like Ossie?"

The scout smiled assent; and his eyes grew fixed and glassy, gazing into hers.

Petrice glanced coyly up at me out of the chip hat. She had told the story with such feeling that her liquid eyes were brimming.

> "'She ended with such passion that the tear
> She sang of shook and fell'—"

I quoted. "Many thanks; your tale is charming."

"Not mine — it is only a likeness of his. I have heard him talk as Poe wrote. He only does it, I know, to amuse me, for he is a perfect optimist."

"Why does he hide himself in the woods?"

"He doesn't *hide;* he loves the woods, I suppose. But I often wonder at him, and so will you."

Ahead of us stretched a narrow, darkling path among the trees, and, gazing along its length, as through a tunnel, I could see at the opening a low log hut, with thatched roof, and, seated before it, three men, two of whom were Schlau and the Major.

"There," said Petrice, "is 'The Mystery' — Doctor Bolt."

CHAPTER XV.

This hermit good lives in that wood.
—*The Ancient Mariner.*

THE pines were so tall, straight, and symmetrical; there was such a wilderness of them; and the narrow clearing gave just enough welkin to save the solitude from melancholy. My eye roamed with delight through all the cool and seemingly interminable avenues, among the beautiful trees, until, closing and dwindling in perspective, their irregular lines melted into the obscurity of distance. In the centre of the open spot arose a circular wall, the mouth of the burning well, and all around, to the green banks of the brook, the earth was soft-carpeted with pine-needles.

Once my eyes rested upon "The Mystery," I had no desire to remove them. Of all men I have ever seen, he remains to me the purest embodiment of soul — yes, in flesh, in marble, or on canvas. You would have said he was threescore years of age, because of the snow-white eyebrows and silken mustache. But the erect, tall figure,

full of health and vigor; the iron-gray hair, not scant and lank, but escaping curly and profuse around his smoking-cap; the gray, gleaming eye, and clear, olive skin, conveyed no sense of failing powers, — they all belonged to a younger man. I cannot describe the attraction there was about him — his agreeable air of modesty, and charming smile; but in his frank face there was not a line left by passion or pain, not a suggestion of frailty to make me regret my sex. If you ask, as George Eliot does of Gwendolen, what gave the "dynamic" expression to his countenance, I should say, the broad, noble brow, the pure, piercing gleam of his eye, and the sweet smile that played always about his perfect mouth — finally, with snowy-white hair against his olive skin, the clean, soulful face told of a blameless life, and that this mark of age was not the triumph of time or sin, but of sorrow. Conjure the face, if you can, — white eyebrows and mustache against dark gray hair and eyes, — but I cannot even tell you of the graceful air he had, which instantly claimed my regard and veneration, as he said, in a clear, mellow voice: —

"You are very welcome here, Mr. Ogden. I am sure we shall be friends."

Presently the earth quivered with a warning rumble.

"Look, now," said Petrice, "watch the well."

Just above the circular wall of stone, as though it were a great boiler, appeared a body of water, ebullient, spumous; mounting into the air with a surly, hissing roar. As the column arose, first a filament of flame darted out wondrously, then a fire from all sides, and at length, as the wriggling shaft shot upward to a height of a hundred feet like some miraculous molten monolith, sharply and beautifully offset against the dusky forest green, the ignited gas burned at the apex as a torch. There the awful phenomenon stood, part way in the dazzling glare of the sun, twisting, sputtering, roaring to be free, until, with sudden noisy collapse, it vanished, flame and all, into the well.

I turned round to meet the curious, smiling gaze of Petrice and the Doctor. Schlau and the Major still talked together, oblivious of us.

"You surely need never be lonely here," said I to the Doctor, "with this raging demon beside you."

His fine eyes met mine calmly, but there was a sad droop about his lips, and instantly I felt

regret, remembering what had been told me, that this burning well was the grave of his slender fortune.

"You can have no adequate idea of its picturesqueness," he said, "until you see it at night, particularly in the light of the moon. Fancy a column of liquid silver like that with a cap of golden fire, against the black woods, with the moon's light over all, and shimmering on these needles."

"Oh, I shall never be happy until I see it," exclaimed Petrice.

He laughed at her ardor.

"When do I sit again for my portrait, Swallow?" he asked. "I could write my name now in the dust that has gathered on it."

"Say Saturday, if the day is fair."

He turned to me.

"Perhaps you can make it convenient to be here by sunset and sup with us? Swallow will prepare a modest meal, and you may both then view the well by moonlight."

She met my look of inquiry with a smile of assent.

"Stop a minute!" interposed the Major, blandly. "You have evidently lost sight of a

very important engagement you have at home this Saturday, Miss Petrice. You remember?"

"Very distinctly," she said, in a careless tone; "but I can't agree with you. It is not at all important or interesting to me. Mamma and I will see to that, Major."

He smiled, but, glancing at his eyes, I recalled the "incorruptible" Robespierre, described by Carlyle as "sea-green."

As the sun drew westward, flashing its light full upon the sparkling column of water, which rose and fell at regular intervals of a few minutes, the flags at the edge of the brook grew greener, and the lily-like stem of the indian-root gradually uplifted, revealing Jack-in-the-pulpit. Through the open door of the log hut, I caught a glimpse of matting on the floor, a student-lamp on a centre-table, and plain pine shelves filled with books. Flicker, robin, and miming cat-bird whistled and warbled overhead in the odorous pines. Once, a distant explosion, like far-off thunder, set the earth quaking, and I looked inquiringly at Schlau.

"Torpedoing," he said.

"Have you never witnessed the operation?" asked the Doctor, in surprise.

"Not yet."

"I wish I could say the same. — No," he added, hastily, "I am wrong. I would not have you think I am unhappy here. Why should I be? God knows, man never had a purer, freer spot to live in — to die in." His face was turned towards me as he spoke, but I felt, perhaps from his restless, uncertain gaze, that the words were addressed to Petrice.

"And what," he continued, even gayly, "if I have had crosses to bear — who has not? May I not receive a rare reward in the sweet tranquillity of the life I am now leading? Yet there again I trip myself. For no one else would I recommend such a withdrawal from the world — it seems silly to seek the shade because one's eyes have been momentarily offended by the glare of the sun. I say to young men and women, carefully educate what social talent you may have — it is the highest instinct of human nature."

Petrice was bending forward, eagerly looking in his face, and he now turned suddenly to her.

"I mean more than mere amiableness, Swallow, which is innate. There is a certain personal charm, a graceful tact of address, that can only

be acquired by social contact with cultured people. The possessors of it are always lovable, always sought after — they are greatly to be envied."

"But it's only an art — mere veneer; and aren't such people, as a rule, agreeable but insincere?" said Petrice.

"Perhaps; but, Swallow, who is absolutely true to himself and to others? Who does not dissemble?"

"Is it a safe cynicism you are teaching, Doctor — this dearth of sincerity in the world?" said the Major.

There was a resentful sneer in his tone; and in the look the Doctor gave him I fancied I discerned a gleam of distrust.

"I regret," he answered, solemnly, "as much as any one may, that there are shams and quacks and all manner of deceit and fraud in the world; but the stubborn fact remains in spite of my sorrow. Neither do I agree with those who would close their eyes and lips to the existence of sin — to me it seems only affectation, and worse, to do so. Rather should we bestir ourselves and crush it out."

As the Major only grinned derisively, the

Doctor, returning to me, continued in his initial vein: —

"I don't deny that I was first grieved at my failure here — the day that well was torpedoed and yielded me only a natural freak, a profitless curiosity. Yet, now, I assure you, I am honestly, prayerfully thankful that my venture proved as it did, that 'Fifteen' was a 'duster,' a thing of beauty rather than of financial profit — a thing to forever cheer and purify me."

"You have sensibly settled down to the inevitable," observed the Major, lightly; "it is really the best thing for a philosophical man to do; though I believe if you had seen as much of the see-saw life of the petroleum country as I have, you might pluck up courage and at it again."

"Perhaps."

"Take myself, for instance. I have gone up and come down with almost every boom in the oil regions. I have known the time when my oil-certificates were in the market; when I boldly called the Model Oil Company a gigantic monopoly and corporate thief — not yet, to my loss, having learned the pronounced moral and legal distinction between stealing a dollar-bill, and simply

omitting payment of government taxes or railroad fares. I saw the colossal hotels of Sandhole flash into fire one night, like that well, and become ashes, merely because it had been so decreed by the jovial young members of a social club. I was present when Pithole was a settlement of fifty people; again when its population numbered more than twenty thousand; and yet again I rode along Oil Creek and saw its site utterly abandoned save by three men who were playing euchre on the dilapidated deck of a derrick. I cannot concede, Doctor, that you have a right to complain until, like me, you have been one day on the invitation committee of a $20,000 dinner, to which special trains ran from all the large Eastern cities, and the next day hypothecating the very type in your office."

The Doctor laughed.

"You do not understand, Major," said he. "I am not heart-broken by loss of money. I am not even now in financial distress. There are men, you know, and there are men."

Petrice had arisen to go, and he now turned towards her with a look of surprise.

"Why do you leave so soon?"

I was equally astonished, her movement had

been so abrupt. She answered his question in a low, impatient tone: —

"I have no reason; I simply want to go."

"You will come on Saturday, Swallow?"

"Yes," she said, extending her hand, and looking full into his smiling face, "I will surely come and finish my sketch of you."

"And you?" he asked, cordially clasping my hand.

"I know of nothing to prevent my joining you."

He bowed as only a gentleman may, and stood watching us cross the clearing. At the road Petrice impulsively turned and looked back, and I could not comprehend the expression of her face, as she saw him still standing there before the cabin, erect and graceful, with his hands clasped behind him; while the well was again giving birth to its roaring monster.

"A strange old creature," observed the Major, complacently, stepping ahead with Schlau. "Truly a 'mystery.' Do you know, with all his venerable appearance, he impresses me as being prematurely old."

"You are quite right," said Petrice, quickly. "He is doubtless younger than yourself, — only forty-five."

She looked maliciously up at me, and, as the Major's back was to us, I could only picture his chagrin at her remark; for, to do him bare justice, he appeared by no means so old.

The Major coughed, and bent his long neck in reflection.

"Ah!" said he, dryly. "So young? There is, then, not an *impossible* disparity between your own ages?"

I gazed wrathfully at the back of his dusty broadcloth coat, and then down into Petrice's eyes. They were very bright, yet hardly with anger; for she was still smiling, and her cheeks were scarlet.

CHAPTER XVI.

O, let it not be hild
Poor women's faults, that they are so fulfill'd
With men's abuses.

— SHAKESPEARE'S *Lucrece.*

A GROUND-SQUIRREL that stood rampant and chattering on the slanting roof at the Soda Fountain broke in upon my confused revery that afternoon as I was slowly returning to the Hat from well "450"; and I turned my footsteps once more towards the Strid. A confused revery, indeed; such a retrospect of jumbled fact and fancy as I will not attempt to remember, save that I am sure there was little or nothing to please me in it all; and that not until I had set foot upon the large flat rock did I lift my eyes and start back in astonishment to find them resting upon the form of Mrs. Corliss. Though I had not seen her on our return to the house, I had supposed her to be within; and now standing there on the opposite stone, with extended hand and pallid face, she seemed only the creature of my imagination, until, smiling faintly, she said: —

"If you will please hold out your hand, I think I can make the leap."

"I saw you," she continued, when, still wondering, I had led her away from the brink of the brook, "leave the road for the Strid. I was then at the bend, and made a diagonal cut to intercept you."

Her composed manner could not entirely hide the agitation of her heart; her bosom fluttered wildly.

"Can I be of service to you?" I asked.

She gazed earnestly into my face.

"Do you know me?"

She asked it so suddenly that I flushed in confusion, and was stammering an evasive reply when she interposed with an eager look.

"I knew you did. But have you told any one? — Has that man — your friend?"

"No."

She was fairly panting now, and swiftly changing white and red; while I, from sheer embarrassment, stood silent before her.

"You cannot, of course, understand my conduct" — she began; but I interrupted her.

"It is not necessary to explain it. Simply believe me to be your friend, and —"

"No, no; I can't bear to have you remain in doubt, thinking God only knows what of me. You are a man; you could face and fight a calumny without dishonor. But think of me left utterly alone, to resist the insidious attacks of the man who had sworn to love and protect me, and whom I had once respected and loved with all my heart."

Her voice broke, and she covered her face with her hands.

"But you can't — only a woman can understand my misery. Yet you may appreciate the love of a mother for her child. And can you appreciate the horror of being told that the one you have trusted and loved, whom you have never wronged in thought or deed — suspects you? That his sudden mysterious suspicions are such that he threatens to make them public unless you quietly leave him — leaving with him the accursed money you have brought him, the little all for which he married you — leave him so that he may say to the outraged law in an allotted time — 'Divorce us; she has deserted me'?"

Her face was now tearless, and really beautiful with the emotions it mirrored.

"You are a *man!*" she scornfully repeated the

phrase, looking passionately at me. "A strong man — so you cannot know why, being conscious of my innocence, I did not boldly stand up before the world and declare it — defying, accusing my accuser. You are a man, I say — but I am a mother; and more than reputation, more than life, more than all else in the world beside, I loved my child, my Petrice. So you see me here, a broken-hearted woman — no, not broken-hearted, God forbid! — but humbled, oh! very much — see, kneeling at your feet and begging with all the fervor of my soul that you pity me, and keep even this shadow of a taint on my name from the knowledge of my child!"

There was no doubting the sincerity of her sobbing tones or the honest appeal in her brimming eyes; but it bewildered and shocked me to have this beautiful woman at my feet.

"You must not kneel to me," I said, gently raising her up. "It is I who should rather ask permission to kiss the hand of such a woman. Trust me in what you ask — but it is so little. I want to be of service to you; lasting service, if I can. Won't you let me prove to you that there is one man, at least, who can deeply sympathize with you, and will labor un-

selfishly to right the great wrong that has been done you?"

She cast a timid, searching glance at me, and then drew a long breath.

"I think your sympathy is heart-felt; but you must pardon me for accepting it so doubtfully. I have not been used to finding men unselfish. Yet in this matter you can prove yourself a true friend by doing what I ask — it is all I wish. My daughter is all I have to live for, and I would not have her a partner of my sorrow — I mean, she must not know that there has ever been a whisper against the good name of her mother. Oh! I hope you rightly understand my motive in this?"

"I do — believe me, I do; and I cordially respect it. But may I ask why the man whom your husband sought to calumniate with yourself —"

"He was the only friend I had during all the lonely years of my child's absence abroad," she said, proudly. "I know what you would ask — how is it he did not interfere? So foul and false were my husband's imputations against me, that I doubt if the pure-minded man he wronged with me knows to this day why I so

suddenly ended our acquaintanceship. He was the soul of honor. But his very existence is unknown to Petrice. She thinks, as I wish her to think, that, outraged by the venality of my husband, I deliberately abandoned him."

"But have you considered well? Is it best to let the matter rest as it is?"

"You can only serve and please me, if you will, in the way I have pointed out. The man who robbed and wronged me is now married again, no doubt to a woman as loving and trusting as I once was — and for what? That he may realize through her a political ambition. It lay in my power to prevent this, perhaps, by legal means, in the year that followed my separation from him; but all my love had turned to ashes when I saw the heartless scheme he had adopted for my dishonor. So I joined Petrice abroad, and at the end of a year returned as happy and contented in her love as it is possible for me to be."

She was quite calm now, and I told her how greatly I pitied her lot, and esteemed the confidence she reposed in me.

"I suppose you would like to know," she said, "my reasons for coming here. I was nearly impoverished when I reached this country, but con-

fident that I would receive from his lawyer, as I had been led to expect, a portion, at least, of the fortune I had brought him. He gave me, however, only a fraction of what was promised. But I must live — must endeavor, for the benefit of my darling child, to multiply this sum, and while we were wondering hopelessly how this could be done, I read accounts of the great fortunes that were being made by everybody in these regions. The idea took possession of me that I should succeed — I could not get rid of it; until finally it settled into a resolution; and, when Petrice gave her consent, I wrote the editor of the journal whose extracts I had read copied into other papers. This was Major Dibbs. I resumed my maiden name; told him nothing of my life; only that I had a certain sum of money which I desired to invest profitably; and I invited his opinion upon the chances I should have of succeeding here. He gave me such hope, kindly offering to superintend my venture, that we came. As you may imagine, I was personally but too glad to escape still longer from the world and be alone with Petrice; and if it were not that I sometimes think I do wrong in hiding her here, even for a little while, I should be happy in

the prospect of living and dying in these woods."

My interest in her was so great that I could not help saying: —

"And the Major? You trust him implicitly?"

She looked at me with a troubled, shrinking expression.

"We were strangers to each other. I had no right to expect unselfish devotion from him. I did not. He proposed no terms, simply accepting my offer of a half profit in the well, should we strike oil; and meanwhile he undertook to invest the balance of my money. In this he has succeeded, for I have already received from him in profits more than the original sum I loaned him. Then, I am sure he selected a faithful and trustworthy man to oversee our well — Schlau Burns. Don't you think so?"

I hardly knew how to answer her.

"Schlau," said I, at length, as she kept her eyes fixed anxiously upon me, "seems an honorable fellow. Yes, I would trust him. But I cannot say so much of the Major."

She nervously pulled the strings of her black straw hat, which, in the heat of her first remarks, she had plucked from her head. Only the brook

foaming noisily through the Strid broke the silence, and the sun seemed to have alighted on the topmost branches of the westerly pines. Suddenly she spoke, in a low, quivering voice.

"A week ago, I think I would have mistrusted your own intention, if you had doubted his honesty to me. Perhaps my hungry wish was father to the thought; but I felt that in him I had at last found a friend. Is it any wonder that I despair of ever meeting an honest man again? — You saw us that terrible night at the Hat?"

I nodded assent.

"My nerves were so unstrung that at each shot from his pistol I screamed from terror. I have wondered since that I did not go mad, or fall dead from fright at that flash of lightning." She shuddered, and looked at me with smiling, bloodless lips.

"May I ask what brought you there? Did you come with him?"

"No, no. That was exactly what I wished to avoid — his knowing that I knew you. But for a week back he had been growing curious about my past life, often questioning me directly upon it. I do not know why he was there, unless

to spy upon your well. I had come upon the same errand that I have to-day, for I was sure that you had recognized me when we passed you in the wagon. I came to implore you to keep my secret for the sake of my child. The rain began falling just as I reached the Hat, and it was while I stood there, utterly wretched in body and mind, that he happened along and found me. Of course, I would not deign him an explanation of my presence; but he tried by every kind of irony to extort one from me, until the report of pistols above drove us from under the trees. We ran down the road, and you know the rest — that awful flash and peal — and you standing up there like a ghost! —"

She paused, and sobbed like a child. As for me, I pitied her with all my heart, for that terrible scene was yet fresh in my memory; the lightning still blinded my eyes, and the thunder had not rolled utterly away.

"And when Schlau brought you to us at the fire — oh! how miserable I was. That night! — that night! And then, when your friend came, it was only the presence of Petrice that saved me from fainting at his feet; for I saw he recognized me at a glance."

Her voice was now broken and hoarse, and I could just distinguish it above the gurgling of the brook.

"Of you I had little fear; we had seen each other but once, and I trusted your face. But with him it was far different. I despise him, I fear him, for I know he was instrumental in my misfortune."

I drew her listless arm though my own, and led her silently along the brook, to the road. Here a cool wind, blowing from the open space, fanned her tear-stained and feverish face; and presently, withdrawing her arm, she replaced her hat, and looked up at me with a brave smile.

"I trust you," she said. "Do you really believe in me?"

"With all my heart," I answered, warmly.

"And you will keep my secret?"

"Religiously."

"Your partner — it would curdle my blood to utter his name — will you speak to him?"

"If you desire it."

"I do, please. He may listen to you; though I cannot have confidence in him."

Strange what stuff we're made of! Because I could share the great sorrow of this handsome,

sensitive woman; because she had opened her heart to me, and shown me its deep wound, and I could sympathize with her and hate for her, — the nameless longings and petty fears that were rankling in my breast but an hour before had now all fled; and I gazed after her retreating form with only a pure and tranquil pity.

As I did so, a tall, thin man appeared around a bend in the road just beyond, and, quickly turning, I hastened towards the Hat with a smiling face; for it was the Major, and I could not deny myself the pleasure of picturing his distraction of mind at sight of us.

CHAPTER XVII.

I venerate the man whose heart is warm,
Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine and whose life,
Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
That he is honest in the sacred cause. — *Cowper.*

When, the next morning, I requested Joyce, in the name of Mrs. Corliss, not to divulge her secret to any one, lest it should come to the ears of Petrice, he listened to me with a provoking smile on his face, and then burst forth into a prolonged whistle, which eventually quivered, and ended in a loud laugh.

"So madam becomes dramatic?" he said; then, to forestall my reply, he carelessly dismissed the subject. "I can assure her — please do it for me! — that I have not the remotest intention or desire to make known her history to any one, much less to her child."

This was all well enough, but he uttered the words in such a tone, and with such a chilling smile on his thin lips, that I disbelieved him. Still, there was nothing I could say to him; so I turned away.

And that afternoon I strolled down through the woods and out upon the hill-side, where a force of men were busy in the work of clearing away the débris of the burned oil-tanks. In the hot sunlight the spot was dreary enough, and more so the wide view it commanded of rocks and stumps and scrub-timber. But Sandhole itself looked dreariest of all; the flame of its gas-jets showed smoky and sickly in the garish glare of the sun, which shone hotly down on the rough tenements, and calcined the spongy mud of the streets. Descending to the level of the lowest tanks, I caught sight of several men at the farther end of the line. At the same time, the Major's familiar voice called out: —

"Tarry a moment, Ogden; I will join you."

He came at once, with the inevitable smile on his face.

"I have just been talking to the superintendent about the Titusville fire," said he. "It is very lucky for Sandhole that all the tanks did not ignite, as there. But it was a beautiful sight — glorious at night! Lighted oil on the water, you know, running through the country; a veritable river of fire. We fought the flames for a week, to keep them from the benzine."

Walking slowly down the hill, he gave me a lively account of the stirring event. I was not interested, however, because it was so plain, from his manner of speaking, that he told the story simply to beguile my attention. Nor was it difficult for me to understand what object he had in view; he doubtless hoped to lead me presently into speaking of my encounter with Mrs. Corliss.

"Are you bound for any particular place?" he asked.

"No, I am only rambling."

"Let us follow ahead, then."

It was the road that ran past Wah Ling's laundry and the church with the monstrous bell. There being no fences, we could walk away from the friable ruts on the scant sod at the sides of the road.

"How many vicissitudes there are in the life of every human being," said the Major, suddenly, in a musing tone.

"Some lives — indeed, the lives of most people, Major — have very few vicissitudes worth mentioning — except the universal one of change with age."

He did not want the conversation to take this turn, and, of course, I knew it. — "Or have you

reference," I added, "to the sort of 'Real—Phantasmagory' which Carlyle discerns in 'being' everywhere?"

"No, no," said he. "Perhaps I shouldn't have said, in the life of every human being. I meant to remark the curious coincidences, meetings and partings, in the lives of many people. They are certainly remarkable."

"No doubt," I admitted, "they are."

"And, as a lawyer, a great number of such interesting things would of course pass under your notice."

"I was not in the law long enough to find out what these 'interesting things' might be, Major."

"Well, I call it interesting, for instance,—decidedly interesting, in fact,—that, after the lapse of a year or two, you and Mrs. Corliss should come together again in such a region as this. Isn't it so?"

I could not refrain from laughing aloud.

I felt certain he was not informed in the matter otherwise than by his own shrewd suspicions.

"You have even a livelier imagination," said I, "than I thought you had."

"What do I *imagine?*"

"That until I met her here I had ever spoken a word to Mrs. Corliss."

He evidently did not perceive the equivocation, but took from my words all the meaning I wished him to infer; and he turned to me with his complacent smile broadened into a skeptical grin, and was shaking his long forefinger at me in gentle reproof, when I prevented a reply by nodding ahead and asking: —

"That is Sampson's, is it not?"

It was a guess of mine, but a safe one, remembering Tim's description of the shanty as standing alone under a tree.

"It is," said the Major, surprised. "That is Sampson's; you have been there before?"

"No, but I have heard of it from Tim."

He burst into a loud guffaw.

"Ah, yes," said he; "I had forgotten."

Sampson was seated under the veranda, with his back against a barrel. His hands were folded placidly over the pit of his stomach, and as we drew nearer it became apparent that he was sound-asleep, broiling in the sun.

The Major halted.

"Will you walk into Sampson's 'parlor'?" he asked.

"'Said the spider to the fly'?" I laughed. "No, thank you; I would rather walk."

He laughed with me, and we passed on, leaving Sampson undisturbed.

"His trade," said the Major, "has dwindled sadly. He will miss our patronage, but we shall be the healthier."

"So I understand from Tim."

"Tim is a jewel," he owned, frankly. "A rare driller; you were lucky to get him."

After that he walked on almost in silence. I knew he only waited for a chance to turn the conversation back to Mrs. Corliss; so I studiously avoided mentioning her name. At length the road curved to the right and ascended the hill.

"This is the way we went to Roughtown — to the ball; is it not?" I asked.

"Yes," he said; then bluntly: "You are to meet Miss Petrice at Fifteen's to-morrow, I believe."

"Yes."

"If you ascended this road to the top of the hill, and then followed the first path to the right, it would take you through the woods past the ruins of the old 'Mystery No. 5,' and bring you out at the burning well. It's the old blazed path."

"Past No. 5?" said I, really thankful for the information. "It goes past the ruins, does it? — where the scout lost his life for Daisy?"

He looked at me in astonishment.

"Daisy?" he repeated; "I don't comprehend."

It occurred to me that the story was no doubt a myth of the Doctor's; perhaps of Petrice's; so I told him how I had heard of the "Mystery."

"That's the well, at any rate," he said; "whether the yarn is true or not. The path takes you past it; and you could also meet it from the Devil's Hat by going along the brook by the Strid."

I felt only grateful to him, then, for the information. I did not understand until the next day what interest he had in imparting it.

We were now half-way up the hill, and the powerful rays of the sun streamed down upon the clearing, with barely a breath of air to bate their burning heat. The prospect of gaining the top, where there must surely be some wind astir, and of branching off into the shady woods, seemed very delightful.

"What do you say?" I proposed; "shall we go to the top and try that path?"

The Major stopped toiling upward, and,

turning his back to the sun, mopped the perspiration from his face and neck. He looked miserably warm in his high silk hat and suit of broadcloth, all covered with dust. Glancing up, he shook his head ruefully.

"It is practicable for you," he said; "the walk will be pleasant and homeward. No; I will return and 'shake hands' with Sampson."

So I left him there, and soon gained the brow of the hill, on which a light breeze was playing. Sandhole presented a wretched appearance, with the white, detective sunlight revealing all its ugly barrenness of color and shade. The blackened derricks looked like charred ruins, and the red tanks on the hill-side were very offensive to the eye against the pale green of the pines. Just as I caught a glimpse of the Major, he disappeared into Sampson's.

It was no trouble to find the path. There was grass up there among the rocks and stumps, and a delicious odor of it scorched by the sun. But in the woods there was the faint sweet scent of dittany and honeysuckle, and I could doff my hat in the soft, cool shade. Swarms of tiniest insects were everywhere, hovering restlessly in rays of sunshine, where they seemed like the waving,

impalpable emanations of heat. Gossamer threads — light fragments of Our Lady's winding-sheet — floated like films before me. Birds were overhead in the boughs, warbling rather spiritlessly, and once or twice, with a sudden flutter and flap of wing, a startled thrush flew, arrow-like, away from its low cover in the bushes.

The path, inclining constantly to the right, brought me at length to a place where the woods shelved abruptly down; and somewhere below there was water running rapidly. Here, also, it was joined by another path, which swerved up the declivity from the sound of the water; and, peering off through the lower woods, I could see a white flash, doubtless the Strid. I was not ready to go to it, however; I wished first to explore this unfrequented path, to find my way to the site of "Mystery No. 5." Even though Daisy was a creature of the Doctor's fancy; even though he had devised the whole story for Petrice's edification, I wanted, nevertheless, to see the spot.

It was not a great distance off. The woods arose and swept farther away from the bed of the brook, until, much swollen in size, it lay exposed to the sun; and from the path, which ran

along the edge of the wooded hill, I could see the corduroy road on the other side of the divide. It was somewhere hereabout that Petrice had pointed when she asked me if I had ever heard the story of the Mystery Well. The path curved inward, skirting a gully, and, glancing over the edge, I saw the ruins, — a few black and half-burned boards lying upon a heap of detritus and ashes, all beaten down by many rains. Out beyond, among the low bushes, there was a vivid gleam of water in one of the quiet reaches of the stream. I turned about, and kept along the path towards a clearing that shone ahead. Perhaps, "Ossie's grave" was actually there; and the scout's. It amused me to think I might find them.

But, before I got to the edge of the woods, I beheld a man lying prone by the side of the path, his head in his hands, and an open book before him. He turned his head, and I saw it was Doctor Bolt.

"I am glad to see you," he said, cordially; "but I must say I am amazed also. I thought I was the only person who used this old path."

I told him how I happened to find it, adding: —

"But I will not disturb your reading; I am only roving about."

"No, no," he said; "stay. It is such reading as one may break off at almost any place without much regret or loss. See? 'The Anatomy of Melancholy.' Yet I can't agree with Lamb's judgment against 'unearthing the bones' of Burton — 'that fantastic old great man.' I really enjoy a nibble at his book, now and then."

He closed the fat volume, and leaned back against the tree.

"I was just searching for 'Ossie's grave,'" I said, sitting down beside him.

"Ossie's grave?" He looked at me in surprise.

"And the scout's." He still regarded me with a puzzled smile.

"Have you forgotten already your story of 'Mystery No. 5'?"

"Oh, no," he said, quickly, with a laugh; "but I never told it to you. Did a bird tell you?"

"Yes, a 'Swallow.'"

"She has a better memory than I. Yes, indeed! — Daisy and the Scout; I remember very well now."

"Was it all fiction?"

"Not at all; it is doubtless true, if she told it

to you as I told it to her. I picked up the facts from an old oil-man at Roughtown."

"Do you often go there?"

"Not now — only for necessaries. But I used to go in preference to going to Sandhole, because it was nearer and not so new. I don't wonder that our fresh, brand-new towns were offensive to the sight and smell of Dickens. But here it isn't the paint — one might tolerate that. It's the utter absence of it — of all color; and only the odor of pine-wood and petroleum. I would even like Sandhole better if it were whitewashed."

"The people are superior to their towns," said I. "It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find such another assortment of human beings."

He laughed softly; and I knew, from the way he looked at me that he felt I had comprised him in the "assortment."

"Most all," he said, "are *hidalgos*, sons of something; and all are animated by what seems to be the most powerful impulse of the age — the rage for money-making. There is no denying what an immense, what a universal importance money has in this day. It seems to be the stimulating force to all great efforts in art, science, and religion. Such a leveller, too! just consider, what

is there, outside of actual happiness and peace, and the flimsy affairs of personal conscience, that can't be bought; or, what is there to-day, short of his own soul, for which there is no Mephistopheles to bid, that a man won't sell? You see how a great foreign artist is here among us, painting portraits in his shirt-sleeves, at so many thousand dollars apiece; for, in the face of such temptation, how can he afford to stop and make sure that each portrait be a product of his best ability — be worth its price, and not simply hold his famous name on the canvas? Or, you see the man of letters — poor soul! money has always been the *bête noire* of his life — you see him selling secret memoirs of his illustrious departed friend, whose post-mortem reputation is thereby sullied through all time. But, then, the dead man is respected by no one; even his relatives will publish his privacies and confessions, for a royalty of ten per cent. So, after all, it is natural that we should see some of these respectable people come here; I am not sure but that it is the most respectable thing they could do, if in urgent need of money, or strongly possessed by the love of it."

He spoke slowly; and though his words were a little bitter, his smile was not.

"Ladies too," he continued; "real ladies! Think of finding a Miss Petrice up here. But there is money in oil; and the love of money is not confined to our sex."

"I don't think," said I, "that you rightly understand the position of Miss Petrice. She was in duty bound to follow her mother here, and the circumstances under which they came were very peculiar — even distressing."

"Of course," he said, hastily, "I did not for an instant suppose that 'Swallow' took an interest in 'wildcatting.' It is clear as day that she has only eyes for the picturesque side of the life around her. But I would consider it very unfortunate if anything short of absolute necessity could induce the mother to seclude her child for any length of time in these regions. She is too clever and well-bred and sparkling for her surroundings."

"I do not believe," said I, "that Mrs. Corliss will remain long."

I had really no authority or reason for saying this; but the subject was a very pleasant one, and I wished to prolong our discussion of it. He regarded me keenly, with an inquiring smile.

"You are intimate with the family? You have known them a long time?"

"No," said I, with some confusion, "only since they came here. You are better acquainted with Miss Petrice than I am."

"I have only met her a few times," he assured me, quickly, — "only a few times. She is a delightful girl — too fine for the woods; but there can come no harm to her — she is bright, pure, and self-reliant."

Despite his uneasy manner, I could not believe it possible that any deceit should dwell in a man who could look at me with such clear, honest eyes and true, handsome face.

"Her visits to me," he added, simply, "have been the most pleasant events in my life here."

He said nothing more; and I did not know what to say, so I pulled a blade of grass to pieces. Then he suddenly straightened forward, and, seizing Burton, sprang to his feet.

"Come," he said, "go with me to the cabin and have tea."

I thanked him, but explained that I must return to the Hat. "And you owe me a visit, you know," I said.

"The Devil's Hat," he repeated. "Yes, I know

where it is; but I never visit; you must be generous and excuse me."

"I believe you have forgotten my engagement with yourself and Miss Petrice for to-morrow evening."

"Oh, no!" he smiled; "by no means. But do you know your way from here? Look! just cross the clearing and descend the hill; from the bottom of it you can see my cabin and hear the well."

I parted from him in the path; but, when I reached the ravine, I heard his voice, and turned around. He was standing at the edge of the woods, waving the "Anatomy of Melancholy" on high, like an excited orator.

"Come early!" he called.

CHAPTER XVIII.

VAL. — Why, how know you that I am in love?
SPEED. — Marry, by these special marks: . . . to relish a love-song, like a robin-redbreast; to walk alone, like one that had the pestilence; . . . — *The Two Gentlemen of Verona.*

ON the dawn of that Saturday, when my eyes opened to the variegated glory of the eastern sky, as I saw it above the tree-tops, through my narrow casement, that slowly grew "a glimmering square," I arose with a buoyancy of spirit (born, perhaps of hope) that, as the day wore on, I reflected upon with a vague feeling of alarm. Doubtless, you can surmise the reason; if you cannot, it is either because you care not to, or your experience in certain very important personal affairs has been extremely limited.

But, as I watched the dissolving pearl and sapphire tints in the east, I was helped, I think, to my happy frame of mind by the clear musical notes of "Punchinello," floating on the air, from Joyce, who, busied far down in the Pit, was whistling the mournful air with such feeling as clearly captivated the birds, for it had started

the full chorus into song. With the rare richness of the dawn, then, and all this contagious melody about me, — to say nothing of the crisp, cool air, which I drank in, like sweet spring-water, in great gulps, — it is no wonder I stood there at the window, and smiled on a world that seemed to smile back on me.

Have you ever arisen like this, on a perfect morning, and, looking out upon the soft twilight, found the delicious dawn of a new hope suddenly singing in your heart? Ah! but the sunsets — says some one? — and the starless gloom of midnight itself, that shall follow!

Joyce presently came to me with a wry face. "If the flow continues falling off at this rate," said he, "the well will be dry in a few days."

"Oughtn't we to be satisfied?" I answered, resignedly. "So far as I am concerned, the well may stop when it pleases. I cannot complain."

He leaned back, laughing merrily.

"You are already tired of wildcatting? You would rather play with a tame 'black cat and kitten'?"

I winced, having no more definite reason for doing so than you may imagine from the facts for yourself.

"Well," he continued, "our tastes differ. I confess to a love for money-making; there is little sentiment left in me but of the practical sort, and you can't make a dead tree blossom. Consequently, the falling-off in our yield is quite a serious matter to me. It indicates that our new well may be a 'duster,' especially if '450' is not; and hence the Devil's Hat may be of no further use to us."

"Very good!" said I, placidly.

He seemed ill-at-ease, and there was a resentful look in his face.

"You are going again to Fifteen's? I must try some day to see that 'Mystery.' Remember me to Mrs. Corliss — or Brace — or Cone — or whoever she is. I have a fancy to run to the city today, and get some business vitality into my dry bones." He glanced dubiously at me, as though prompted to say something more, which would not, however, be uttered, and then turned away.

Is there really a man whose heart can withstand the melody of birds? One in whom any black passion can rankle while the innocent, joyous music floats and throbs in the air? I thought it impossible, that afternoon, as, hat in hand, I

slowly made my way, by the unfrequented path, towards the burning well.

Odor of honeysuckle and sweet-root mingled with the pervading fragrance of the tall pines, under which I walked as in a vast tent of intricately woven net-work; the deep blue of the sky showing through the interlaced branches as a beautiful azure fabric — a wonderful celestial lining behind the complicated meshes of this tent. And hopping about in the tangled net-work were the little warblers, pouring forth their souls — truly, the very souls of song — until I was led insensibly to step along in fancied measure through the soft, transparent shadows, which lay like the cooling touch of an east wind upon the moss and needles. Presently, I am sure, the birds themselves began to see that I was marching to their melody; for they followed me overhead in fluttering strains.

At length, I came to the ravine, and halted as I had done the day before. There below me, in the midst of a wild, green life, lay the charred ruins of the old Mystery well; beyond coursed the swift stream, and above it was the corduroy road.

Dazzled by the gleaming surface of the narrow brook where it burst from the thicket into the

radiance of the sun, I raised my eyes to the road, and followed it curving away until it swept sharply from view around the base of the hill upon which I was perched. I peopled this road again with Schlau and the Major, Petrice and myself; and I heard her low voice relating the story of Daisy and the scout. And then, closing my eyes, with a quiet peace at my heart, but with my pulses beating as from a glass of sparkling wine, there came to me the first certain consciousness I had felt — or if feeling had had the courage to acknowledge — that I was in love. All the fleeting emotions of which I had been sensible during the past week, the vague longings I had felt, the sentimental moods into which I had fallen, — all crystallized into this sudden but certain consciousness, — and I confessed it gladly, with the sound of marriage-bells ringing in my ears. A cloud passed darkling across the face of the sun, and I recovered from my silly musing, fairly blushing. The surface of the brook lay dulled to the tint of steel beneath, and in its depths were mirrored the ragged outlines of the bushes fringing the road-side. Even these, to my eyes, became familiar forms and faces, until, quickly as it had come, the cloud swept away from the sun's

face, and the rippling brook flashed light upon me, and I turned aside. I was very happy; far happier than I had ever been before.

When I paused, the birds had ceased their singing, save a few sporadic ones that had kept up a petulant piping somewhere above; but now, as I moved forward again, they followed me with open throats towards the clear space at the brow of the hill just beyond. And there I turned, laughing gayly at the odd conceit, and, looking up at them, where in confused ranks they fluttered chattering on the edge of the woods, I told them softly but with a wild impulse to shout the words to the fleeing air, that it might carry the news around the world: —

"I love Petrice! — I love Petrice!"

How well I remember it all: my crossing the little run where the swelling rumble reached my ears, like the minatory roar of a bull; and then the white water, with its red cap, rising from the earth like some plutonic monster. I was almost abreast of it before the column sank with a shrieking splash, and, springing upon the rocks, I peered curiously down into the walled opening — nothing but inky darkness and floating spray and the strong odor of petroleum. And, I re-

member, while I approached the cabin with a wildly beating heart, a robin, far up in some pine, chirped an unusually robust note, like a signal, and I smiled upward in its direction, wondering if it was one of the flock that had heard my sweet secret.

Petrice and the Doctor were not outside; but, as I approached the open window of the front room, her voice from within, low and gentle, arrested my footsteps. It was not what she said, — I only caught the last two words, — "so isolated." It was the tone in which she uttered them, full of sympathy; a tone so finely modulated that, without the words, it conveyed to my ears the sense of a pitiful pleading, and, at sound of it, I stood rooted to the spot. There followed a silence of a few minutes, during which I listened breathlessly, utterly insensible to the dishonorableness of the act. And I inwardly cursed the chattering bird at which I had but just thrown a smile of confidence. At length I heard his voice, mellow and clear: —

"Not 'isolated,' Swallow, surely. You are too youthful and hopeful to understand the happiness that suffices me. But I am not wanting in companions; who are you, pray, if not a sunbeam in

my life here? And, should my spirits ever sink, could I find a more constant or boisterous comrade than I have in the well?"

He spoke in a bantering, coaxing tone; but his accents were not so musical to my ears as they had been the day before. I bent anxiously forward and listened, while Petrice half-whispered, in an eager, hurried voice: —

"You are not candid or serious with me. I cannot believe that you were intended for a drone. Plainly, do you think it right that you should retire so early from the world, when there may be important duties for you to perform; when it may be yet in your power to accomplish great good?"

He broke into a light laugh; and I was so glad to hear it!

"Nor am I a drone, Swallow; and, now you take me to task so wisely, I will tell you how I manage to live. I have turned story-writer. Those sketches I told to you are samples of what I write, and thus far I have found no difficulty in selling them. For instance, I have woven you into a story."

"Thank you," she said, dryly; then quickly adding, in a remonstrant tone: "But is that all?

You are writing, you say, to live. Which means, I suppose, that, if you could avoid it, you would not write at all. You have no other object in view, — no ambition worthy of you. Do you think it right?"

There followed quite a long silence, and my head grew dizzy, as with vertigo. When he at last spoke, it was in a different voice, heavy with a repressed weariness, that provoked even in me a responsive pity.

"I am not of an indolent nature — only sensitive. Very sensitive, Swallow; and I sometimes fancy the every-day, busy world has no use for such a man — at least, he has no right to expect special immunities or distinguished considerations. You see I am not foolish or bitter; I never could be a pessimist or a misanthrope. I do not seem broken-hearted, either, do I? And yet, Swallow, after many years during which I struggled hard to subdue this supersensitiveness of mine, and actually learned to regard it as morbid and vicious, there came a time when my maturing belief in the righteousness of social laws and practices met with a sudden shock and check. It was a staggering blow, Swallow; one from which I fear I shall never

recover. It has left me what I wish I was not — a disbeliever in the purity of men's motives. So in these woods I am happy; removed from all deceptive things, only confronted by living realities. I do not care to return among men again, for, with the distorted vision I now have, I should only see lies and shams and cant. You should not blame me, for our natures are widely different, and your young life as yet has known nothing but joy. This is all very vague, Swallow; but your woman's instinct may inform you better of the character of the shock I met with, and of my present feelings, than I can tell you."

I say that while he was uttering these words so simply, but with a pathetic undertone, I pitied him with all my heart. And how felt Petrice?

"You were in love?" There was no pity or sympathy in her voice. I had never heard the intonation before. She almost demanded the question of him, and, as she did so, a sickening conviction forced itself upon me.

"No — yes," he said, in startled surprise. "But, however that may be, it is not for us to dwell upon. Tell me, Swallow, of your life abroad."

There was a mild rebuke in his words. I leaned forward, and through the screen of the

cypress that crept partly across the open window, saw Petrice. She sat by the opposite window, with a sketch-book in her lap, and a pencil in her hand, and one of the few sunbeams that could steal through the close-woven branches of the pines fell upon her golden hair. Her beautiful face was flushed, her lips parted, and her eyes downcast upon the open book in her lap. The Doctor was invisible in the angle back of the window through which I was peering; for suddenly as I looked all revived at sight of her, she lifted her long lashes, and with deepening color bent forward, until I caught the brilliant lustre of her blue eyes, and my own ached with the intensity of my devouring gaze.

"But why should you distrust women as well as men? There is more than one loving woman in the world, who would be proud to —"

I could bear to hear no more. My heart gave a great bound, for I had stood with bated breath, and I felt choked and smothered. As I turned away, the ground shook, and the seething water in the well found vent again with a savage roar.

When I could look clearly and calmly about me, I was surprised to find myself standing again

on the brink of the ravine above the ruins of the "Mystery No. 5." To this spot I had unconsciously hurried, and now, fagged out, paused in the soothing wind that drifted up the slope, and let my glance rest languidly upon the brook and winding road. Here not a half-hour before had I stood, and gladly felt the secret of my heart, and there at the edge of the woods I had turned to the birds, and in hushed voice made the open avowal — "I love Petrice! — I love Petrice!"

Now I hated my heart for the confession of its weakness. I bitterly cursed the fate that had led me, step by step, to my present misery — Joyce, the Devil's Hat, this woman and her daughter. *Her daughter!* alas, at thought of her my blood warmed against my will; I could not think of her coldly, dispassionately. Instead, the hot words leaped to my lips again, "I love Petrice!"

And yet how could I? I felt that what I had overheard was an immodest thing, — advances from a girl so young, to a man of his years. Her strange conduct, when we visited the well together, was now made clear to me. But it was impossible for me to imagine ill of her. My mind revolted; and, beyond the conviction that Petrice

loved the Doctor, I despised my efforts to make out aught against her. To the sanguine man there comes, after every grief, a revulsion of feeling, whereby his wits are sharpened; and, in a contemplative mood, he finds a season of hopeful tranquillity, however transient and fictitious, wherein his fancy, grown presently luxuriant, may depict for him a future of such delights as will utterly obscure the remembrance of the misfortune, from which his present exuberance is but the natural reaction. Knowing this, as you must, there is no need to say more than that I am, happily, of a very sanguine temper.

When I again approached the hut, it was with scarcely less agitation than before, but with a certain self-possession born of a vague sense of wrong done me, and the knowledge that I held a secret like a sword over the head of the woman I loved. The satisfaction I found in this was too indefinite for me to express it.

Her face was turned aside, but, as I stood in the doorway, she glanced up, flushing painfully, and regarded me with a forced smile that I hated to see. The Doctor sat in a far corner, with bowed head, idly turning the leaves of a book.

When he arose and welcomed me, I did not fail to note the troubled look in his eyes.

"May I see the sketch?" I asked of Petrice.

"Certainly," she said, handing me the book.

It was a striking resemblance, very cleverly executed; and I felt a keen pang of jealousy, gazing at his noble head, and fancying the tenderness with which her skilful fingers had portrayed it.

"I am almost sorry she has finished it," said he, pleasantly, "for I fear, now she is done with me, I shall see her no more. Is it so, Swallow?"

She had arisen, and now looked him steadily in the face. Her own was inscrutable.

"I will send you my portrait," she said. "It will answer just as well. You are by nature quite sufficient unto yourself; and, as you once told me, I serve mainly to remind you of some dear friend."

He looked calmly down at her, and made no reply.

"Mr. Ogden," she added, turning to me, "you will stay and see the well by moonlight? I am sorry I am not in the humor of doing so, too; but I should not enjoy it to-night. I have worked my eyes into a violent aching. No, no, — please;

let your hat remain where it is. I truly hope you will consent to stay with the Doctor, and let me stroll home alone. It will be light, or twilight, for an hour yet."

Of course, I knew she was sincere in saying this. I was sure she would rather walk home alone than in my society; but I was willing to thrust myself upon her, to undergo the mortification of knowing that my presence to her was an irritant and burden — for her safety's sake.

And I would not be happy with the Doctor. How could I be? Ah, this passion of love! how it can transform and dwarf our natures. I knew, beyond all doubt, that I was grasping the hand of an honest, a noble man, and gazing into clear eyes that mirrored as pure a soul; and yet, — and yet — I cannot confess to you how bitterly I felt towards him.

Nor was I in the humor to see the burning well by moonlight. Now, as it arose roaring into the air, it typified to me the exaltation of my spirit but a little while before, when I stood on the hill a self-confessed lover, with a passion glowing within me like that cap of red fire; and, as it sank, so had my heart suddenly fallen into the depths of despair.

Yet, as this fire was not extinct, but only hiding while it gathered force for a fresh outbreak, so my passion burned steadily within my breast, struggling, like flame, to leap into mad words whenever I looked at Petrice.

CHAPTER XIX.

It is wonderful! When my heart feels the most warmly . . . it is as if my hands and my tongue were tied; I cannot describe, I cannot express my own inward state. — *Hans Andersen.*

I PUT myself in her place. I felt that the presence of any one but herself would be a burden to me then; so I did not care to rasp her own feelings with words of mine. Many times I glanced at her — longing to speak, and yet not knowing what to say.

She said her head ached, and I could pity her, though I did not believe her. Now and then she would arouse herself and say something, but I saw these efforts were painful to her; and I shortened my replies. Often since, in recalling this walk, I have wondered at the tact, if nothing else, that I manifested in the restraint of my tongue.

Thus we came in silence to the crest of the hill overlooking the snug little house. Mrs. Corliss was seated upon the porch, reading. Down by the dam stood five or six men, the Major's tall figure in the centre of the group,

his back towards us, and his arm moving in impressive gesticulation.

"You have visitors to-day," said I.

"We have struck oil, I suppose," she answered, indifferently.

"Indeed?"

She turned to me with an inquiring smile.

"Are you really surprised? Do you mean to say that you and your partner did not suspect that we would be likely to strike oil to-day."

"I can't answer for Selden," I said; "but, truly, I have not given the matter a thought. I congratulate you."

"Of course, I must believe you," she said; "but I confess I thought, with the Major, that you came here to scout. You are certainly a very unselfish wildcatter."

"And you," I retorted, hurt by her cool words, "must be a very shallow observer not to have seen why I came here. Is it possible you do not know why?"

We had descended the hill-side, and passed among the rocks, and were now close to the house. Mrs. Corliss, observing our approach, had arisen from her chair. At my words Petrice suddenly flashed her eyes upon me. She

made no reply, but went quickly towards her mother.

"I see a thousand questions on your lips," she said, with something of her usual vivacity; "but don't ask them. I will give you all the answers without any quizzing. There has been no explosion at Fifteen's, — no accident of any kind. I am not hurt; neither is Mr. Ogden. We did not stay to see the burning well by moonlight, because I didn't want to. The fact is, I tired myself sketching the 'Troglodyte'; and, if Mr. Ogden will excuse me, I intend to go in and lie down at once."

"But the sketch, dear; I would like to see it, please," called her mother, as Petrice abruptly turned away.

She returned with the book, saying, carelessly: —

"It is nothing to see," and then vanished in the house.

While she searched for the Doctor's portrait, I congratulated Mrs. Corliss on her good-fortune in the well.

"Yes," she said, "the Major says it is flowing splendidly. I only hope Schlau has succeeded at the exchange. I am overjoyed

about it for her sake. I can now see my way clear."

I told her how cordially I wished for her future happiness; and then, having nothing else to say, and longing very much to be alone, I was lifting my hat to go, while she gazed fixedly upon a page of the open sketch-book. She drew a long breath as I bade her good-by, and looked absently into my face, and I saw that her own was colorless. Perhaps it only seemed so in the gathering twilight.

"Mr. Ogden!"

I was back among the rocks when I heard her calling me in a low, tremulous voice. She was at my side in an instant, all flushed now, and panting.

"Well?" I gently inquired.

"I do not know how to speak to you—I fear you will misunderstand me."

"I am sorry you feel that way," said I. "I would like you to trust in my friendship, to rely entirely upon my sincere belief in you."

The day was nearly dead, and only a tinted, vaporous light penetrated the gloom of the woods. She stood silent for a moment, and then, suddenly opening the sketch-book, which

she held before her, asked me, almost in a whisper: —

"You have seen the 'Mystery' — that man at Fifteen's. Is this a faithful portrait of him?"

"Yes, it is very much like him."

"I will tell you, then," she said, closing the volume, and looking steadily at me, "that I think he is my friend, the one whose name was so unjustly coupled with my own. I could not mistake his face, but I want you to discover for me if I am right. He gives his name, I hear, as Doctor Bolt; I am almost sure he is Professor Talcott. It would be a great favor if you could learn the truth for me."

I was glad of the darkness, else she must surely have seen in my face some signs of the amazement her words produced in me. Petrice in love with the "friend" of her mother!

Yet I believed this friendship to have been a perfectly pure and guiltless one. It was not that I pitied Petrice. On the contrary, I avow that the news filled me with a selfish joy. And at once a hope entered my heart that prompted these words: —

"I will do what you ask, with pleasure; but don't you think the time is come for you to

inform your daughter of all that you have kept from her? I know she has the profoundest belief in the honor of this gentleman; and I think it would be much better for you to tell her the whole injustice done you, and prepare her for the discovery of an acquaintanceship between the Doctor and yourself, than to have the matter crop out in this mysterious way. It would be very painful to her — very awkward for you."

I was wondering how she would receive this counsel as I uttered it; for I dreaded its rejection. But she quickly answered me, in a frank, confiding tone: —

"I think you are right; I will do as you say," — and she hastily left me.

I pictured to myself the scene that would ensue between Petrice and her mother; the pretty face first flushed at the story of her parent's suffering; and then the swift change when the Doctor's identity was revealed. I could see her astonishment, her sudden hauteur and shame; and the mother's distress, fearing that the child's manner meant want of sympathy — perhaps, suspicion of her. This picture was very pleasing to me. I had compassion for the mother, but felt assured her grief and doubt

would be fleeting: there could be no permanent estrangement between them. It was in the contemplation of the child's speechless humiliation that I found my pleasure — it gave me, I repeat, a great hope.

From this one picture my fancy drew a panorama of delightful scenes, until presently I discerned in the evening light a real figure approaching me on the corduroy road. It proved to be Schlau; and, when I hailed him, he exclaimed in a tone of alarm: —

"Is anything wrong at the well? I thought you were at Fifteen's with Miss Petrice." I told him of her indisposition to remain, adding: —

"You will be pleased to know that '450,' according to Mrs. Corliss, 'is flowing splendidly.'" He gave a low laugh, and placed his hand upon my shoulder.

"You see, you miscalculated," said he. "I'm sorry for you, but I don't think the two of you together know enough yet to work the market. It would have been better if you'd been satisfied with the good stake you made out of the Hat."

"I don't understand. What do you mean?"

"Oh, come, Mr. Ogden!" he said, in a banter-

ing tone; "where's the use of hiding your game, now you've lost it? You didn't think, all this time, that you were closing my eye up, or the Major's, did you?"

I suspected his meaning, and felt provoked at him.

"If you believe that I have been playing the scout at your well," said I, "or have been the least interested in its flow, other than for your own good, you are very wrong."

"Look here," he said, impatiently, "do you mean to say that you weren't in with your partner in his speculation at Oil City to-day?"

"I mean that, and more. I did not even know he intended to speculate to-day."

"Well, he did, and made a fine burst of it, too. I guess he thought we were sure to strike a duster, because the Hat was weakening. You're lucky if you didn't join him in this deal. To tell the truth, I always thought he was the brains of your firm; but he was a little too smart to-day."

"Has he lost heavily?"

Schlau laughed.

"Well, said he, "we've won pretty heavily, and he lost as much as we made. The fact is, the fool bought all we wanted to sell. He looked

awful happy until 'Sandy' sprung the news and the market dropped."

I left him and hurried on to the Hat. Joyce was not there, but Tim anxiously awaited us at the mouth of the Pit.

"She's stopped flowin'," he said. "We ought to pump her right away; mebbe she'll yield ten bar'l."

"Do as you please," I told him, feeling so little interest in the well that its fate was now a matter of indifference to me.

The evening air was chilly and damp, and I found it pleasant to lean against one of the iron pipes in the warm glow of the belching gas. The sky was covered with a gauzy vapor, through which the stars sparkled like brilliant eyes behind a fine veil. In spite of our unfriendly relations, it was natural that I should feel anxious about Joyce's misfortune. I recalled his hesitating manner in the morning, when it was evident he was undecided whether to take me into his confidence or not. How had he kept himself so well informed of the development of "450"? And here my sympathy for him died suddenly away. Yes, I would rather see him beggared than enriched at the expense of Mrs. Corliss and

Petrice; and it was doubtless because he surmised as much that he had kept his secret from me.

It was not long before I descried him in the gas-light, coming rapidly towards the Pit. I called to him, and he approached me, whistling a lively tune. He was either not the bankrupt Schlau had made him out to be, or he was trying, for some occult reason, to conceal his ill-luck. I would get at the truth without parleying.

"Schlau has told me, Joyce," said I, "of your bad luck. I am sorry for you. If I can be of any assistance, I want you to command both me and my bank account."

He had come in front of me, and a glance at his face convinced me that Schlau had told the truth. It was very haggard, and his eyes were unnaturally bright. He had been drinking, and at my words broke out into a loud, harsh guffaw.

"So the glad tidings have gone forth, and got to the Hat ahead of me, eh? No!" he added, fiercely, "I don't want any help. I'm not yet a financial cadaver. Why, you don't suppose the Hat is worthless, do you? I can make a dozen fortunes out of it yet."

"You are too sanguine. The well has stopped flowing."

His jaw fell. The news staggered him, but only for an instant.

"It has not been torpedoed," he said. "The oil isn't exhausted. Your charming friends have attracted it to themselves by great pressure, and perhaps it is only fair they should enjoy the flow for a season — until we can sink another well and coax it back. Besides," he added with an oath, turning on his heel, "I am not so sure but that your 'charming friends' will be only too glad in a little while to relinquish their hold upon it."

I walked to the edge of the Pit, and, standing where the water sprang out into the flickering glare of the gas, watched him descend the rough stone steps, and wondered what he could mean.

CHAPTER XX.

— With a man like our Professor, matters must often be expected to take a course of their own . . . in short . . . on no grand occasion and convulsion, neither in the joy-storm nor in the woe-storm, could you depict his demeanor.

— *Sartor Resartus.*

My mind was so occupied with thoughts of the day's curious revelations that all night long I dreamed of the Doctor, Petrice, and Mrs. Corliss; dreamed such unpleasant things that finally, when Petrice, with flashing eyes, thrust her mother violently aside, and cast herself upon the Doctor's breast, I awoke bathed in a cold sweat, my eyes hot and aching, and my heart beating wildly.

Joyce had left the Hat before the sun was up, Tim said, leaving no other word than that he would return before nightfall. The pump was in action, forcing the oil at the rate of about a dozen barrels; "Which, in my opinion," said Tim, "is the handsomest she'll ever do for ye."

So, filled with a nervous dread of my dreams, I

sauntered away in the direction of the burning well. I would see the Doctor at once, and discover his identity; and my heart was so engaged in this enterprise that it fretted at the tardiness of my limbs, though I was soon striding along the road with all my might. The noise of wheels behind me at length attracted my attention, and I stepped aside to let the fast approaching vehicle pass. It was Tickly-Bender, seated alone on the box of his "Terror."

"Hello!" he cried, drawing rein. "Won't you take a lift? Where ye goin'? Fifteen's? Get up, then; I kin drop you out close by. No, that's all right," he laughed, as I cast a dubious glance at the box; "it's empty. I'm goin' for a load now."

I mounted to his side, right thankful for the diversion, and the chance to reach the "Mystery" more quickly. There was a pronounced odor of Jamaica rum in the air when Tickly-Bender turned from shouting a profane command to his horse, and said: —

"I jus' left yer partner at the 'Bullwheel.' Dast if I ever give him credit for bein' so 'live. He's a hummer."

"Is he?" said I, amazed.

"Yes, he's a reg'lar hummer. I had three rums an' a cocktail with him."

So Joyce was drowning his sorrow.

"I tole him, says I, 'Mister Selden, us fellows have mistook yer make; we took you for a long-face. Fact is, we've been a-layin' for you since you shot at us that night on the Hat.' 'Oh!' says he, 'I'd never do that. It was Ogden.'"

This little meanness of his neither surprised nor vexed me.

"He engaged us," continued Tickly, placidly, "to come to the Hat some night, and bust yer well for you."

I was not in the mood to discuss this business with him. I preferred to remain quiet and let him amuse me. So I asked him: —

"How do you like moonlighting?"

"Purty well."

"You're the oldest torpedoer about here, aren't you?"

I expected him to look consequential at this remark; but he didn't.

"They ain't no such thing as a *old* 'torpedoer,'" he said, dogmatically. "I never knowed or hear tell of a man gettin' wenerable in the busi-

ness. But I guess I've lived as long as any 'shiner 'n these parts. The boys say I'm a 'livin' caution'; they say it's unnatschrel, that I ain't got the right to stick out so long. Dick Suttle says, last week, 'I'll bet you a pound of paraffine, Tickly, that you're destroyed in a month.' But I wouldn't take him.

"Why don't you drop the business, and take up a healthier one?"

He grinned, and disregarded the question.

"The trouble is, I'm a-thinkin', that all of us fellows believes every one else but hisself's a-goin' to bust. Now, I used to think it was purty ticklish work to smuggle glycerine up here from town. We brung it on the trains, in grip-sacks. But Lor'! *now,* that 'd be nothin'.

"Why, they was thirteen of us started moonlightin' together, an' when one year was up, guess how many of us was left! — Three. You see, I got so I didn't mind the goin' to pieces, what the papers call the 'sickenin' details' — it was the lonesomeness. Then my wife got lippy about it. When we was first married, she was always a-cryin' about my foolin' round the glycerine. It was, 'O Si! what would I do if you was took away!' or 'Si, I can't sleep a wink if you go

out to-night.' But, bimeby, she eased down; then she got on the fence; an' now she's used to it — too dast used to it, I'm a-thinkin'. She won't hear to my carryin' my watch any more. 'No, no, Si,' she says; 'when you're blown up, where's the sense of carryin' off what little propity you *have* got?'

"Then, they was three of us left — Bill Tuppin, Tom Picks, an' me. We used to talk about it together, an' Bill 'd say, 'Tickly, you're the next one, sure as shootin,' if you ain't more partickler lowerin' the cans'; an' I'd say, 'Tom Picks, if you don't drive yer mare with a tighter rein, you're a-goin' up, sure'; an' I guess Tom pitied both me an' Bill, for he never said much. But purty soon Bill swore he b'lieved thirteen had been a unlucky number, an' said he was goin' to get a place with the 'reg'lars.' An' he did. That was at Tidioute; an' one day Tom an' me was talkin' to the superintender of the torpedo company, when Bill druv by with fifty quarts aboard, goin' towards the magazine, a iron safe that stood over 'n a clearin.' The superintender was blowin' to me an' Tom 'bout what a bulge his company had on the railroads in accidents to the men. 'There's no damages 'lowed the

family,' says he, 'an' as there's hardly any remains, we ain't even got the funeral expenses to pay.' After a bit, there was the usule noise over be the woods. The superintender jumped three feet, an' swore. 'Fifty quarts, by George!' says he. We walked over, an', as we was going', Tom turns to him an' says, 'If Bill's gone up, gimme his job?' 'Mebbe,' says the boss; 'but, I tell ye, you'll have to be more partickler 'n Bill. He's the fifth man this month, makin' a total loss of more 'n five hundred quarts. The company can't stand sech nonsense.'

"Sure enough, there was a nasty hole 'n the ground, but not a sign of Bill or his team. Purty soon we saw some bits of the wagon up in the trees, an' the superintender found a bit of meat, dry and scorched. Them was all. 'Is it man or horse?' says Tom; and dast if we could tell. No more could Bill's wife, but she run the risk, an' buried it."

"Horrible!" I said.

Tickly-Bender was pleased with my exclamation.

"Why," he continued, in a boasting tone, "I once helped to pick up what was left of five busted torpedoers. They on'y half filled a cigar-box. You should uv seen the five widders

sortin' the pieces! Why, they cried an' jangled over the most decent-lookin' chunks of meat, till Mrs. Punkey got the prize package. It was a part of a rib, an' she was tremenjous proud about it; for, she says, 'it's not horse, any way.'"

We were now at the point on the road where the path diverged that led through the woods to Fifteen's. I was not sorry to leap down from the "Terror," for, though Tickly-Bender's conversation had, indeed, proved diverting, it was anything but cheerful.

"But Tom Picks," I asked, curious to know his fate; "is he still alive?"

"No, sir," said Tickly, in a decided voice; "he ain't alive; not by a jugful. Tom Picks went up last Good Friday, leavin' me the on'y survivin' 'shiner of the 'riginal thirteen. We buried him in a tomat' can, but as we wasn't certain if we had him or his horse, the boys wrote on the lid with a nail: — 'Tom Picks, or Driller, his mare.'"

Tickly-Bender saw nothing to smile at in this ghastly piece of humor. Not a muscle of his tranquil, sallow countenance relaxed; but when I turned to leave him, and said, in a warning, friendly tone: —

"I advise you, Tickly, to abandon your profession, if you want to remain a sole survivor. You are sitting every day on the lid of a volcano — " He burst into a roar of laughter.

"So was you," said he. "There's easy a hundred quarts in the box now. I told you there wasn't any, 'cause I wanted you to feel comfortable"; and, roaring again at my amazement, he sent the "Terror" spinning along the corduroy road.

The well was spouting as I issued from the woods into the clearing. The Doctor was not in sight, but the door of the cabin was wide-open; and, when I came in front of it, I saw him seated within, at a table, writing. He raised his eyes and, observing me, at once sprang to his feet and gave me a cordial welcome.

Now that I was face to face with him, my impatience fled, and I felt very much embarrassed, and uncertain how to proceed.

"You are busy?" I said, halting in the doorway.

"No, no! be seated. I think, with King Francis: —

> "'When a man's busy, why, leisure
> Strikes him as wonderful pleasure:
> Faith, and at leisure once is he?
> Straightway he wants to be busy.'"

"My visit," said I, put at ease by his graceful greeting, "will not afford you entire leisure. I have business with you."

"Indeed? this is a red-letter day. I think yours will be the first real business ever transacted in this hut."

"Shall I envy you or not?"

"Envy me? Oh, no. There should be nothing in this solitary life of mine to captivate a young man of promise and ambition."

"Your words have little weight with me," said I, smiling; "for your appearance is against them. You seem full of vigor, full of promise yet, to use your own words. Your solitary life does not seem to have crushed your spirit."

A melancholy expression came over his handsome face, and he rested his gaze on the floor, repeating, in a low, unaffected voice these lines from Browning: —

> "'Each life's unfulfilled, you see;
> It hangs still, patchy, and scrappy:
> We have not sighed deep, laughed free,
> Starved, feasted, despaired — been happy.'

"No," he continued, "my spirit has not been crushed. I simply have not *been happy*. I mean, I have not attained the full measure of my hap-

piness; few people do. But in my case I think I know the reason why. I tell you candidly, because it is a thing of regret to me, not of shame. The cardinal error of my life has been that, in seeking to realize my professional aspirations, I overlooked until too late a real and salutary need of my nature — the love of a true and pure woman."

He said this, that from another man might only have sounded droll in my ears, with such mournful earnestness that I regarded him in silent pity.

> "'Each life's unfulfilled, you see;
> It hangs still, patchy, and scrappy —'"

he quoted again, with a smile. But the well roared upward, checking him.

I saw my chance, and, mustering courage, spoke out as the column sank, rumbling, underground.

"It is a very delicate mission I am on. We are so slightly acquainted that I fear you will at first consider it very presuming of me to undertake it. But I rely upon your gratitude in the future. Can you believe this, and will you grant me leave to ask you a very personal question, thinking generously of the motive that prompts

me to ask it, should your answer be different from what I expect?"

"Most certainly," he said, with a puzzled smile.

"Plainly, then, are you not Professor Talcott?"

He gave a faint start in his chair, and leaned towards me with an inquiring look, still smiling.

"Yes, sir; I am. Why do you ask?"

I had broken the ice, but felt by no means secure in my position. We gazed at each other for an instant, and then I cautiously proceeded, —

"Since you allow me to unmask you so graciously, I will venture to tell you some news — news that I hope may please you."

He shifted about in his chair, and eyed me with impatient expectancy.

"I thought it might interest you to learn that an old acquaintance, who knew you as Professor Talcott, is now resident in the neighborhood; a person whom I fancied you might wish to meet again."

"Who is the 'person'?"

"Mrs. Ellen Brace."

He straightened up in the chair, his face grown suddenly serious. Then he sprang to his feet, and paced the floor, with his hands clasped behind

him. At length he paused, resting a hand upon the table, and turned to me with a searching glance.

"And may I ask of you, please, the reason of your friendly concern in our meeting?"

How could I answer him? I tried to do so in a stammering, evasive way, but all I can remember of what I said was the explanation: —

"I first learned of this lady while a student-at-law in the office of the Honorable Hewson Dilster."

His face became very pale at these words, his lips curled, and he threw upon me a look of deep distrust.

"I should have known you were a lawyer," he said, in a sarcastic tone, "by your adroit tongue. But let me correct you. You say the Honorable Hewson Dilster. I say the very *dis*-Honorable Hewson Dilster — a professional scoundrel, who will gladly engage, for a round sum of money, to compass the ruin of any human being. A man, in my estimation, infinitely more degraded of soul than most murderers, since it is a profitable employment with him to blast the reputation and happiness of defenceless women. And you are his pupil? I pity you,

sir; and if you resemble your master, or have an admiration for his methods, or are like the whelp that hound once sent to fawn upon and bite me, I tell you, beforehand, I despise you!"

He stood perfectly still before me, calmly and bitterly uttering these passionate words, and all the color fled from his face. I had not the right to feel angered at him, but I was vexed that he should suspect and misunderstand me. So I answered him with some warmth: —

"I am not in need of your pity. Far from admiring the rascally methods of Mr. Dilster, I have no fondness for the profession of law itself; I am no longer a lawyer. In respect of yourself I never heard your name until I heard it last evening from the lips of Mrs. Brace."

He withdrew his gaze from mine, and again paced the floor, while I hastily told him of my chance settlement at Sandhole, my meeting with Petrice, her mother's revelation to me at the Strid, and, finally, of her recognition of his portrait.

"And I want you to believe," I concluded, "that I have come upon her errand alone, as she herself will tell you; not as a 'whelp' from any 'hound.'"

He listened attentively to me, growing presently so interested in my account of the incidents attending Mrs. Brace's divorce, as she had related them, that he halted, leaning in the doorway, and kept his eyes, now kindling with their customary kindliness, fastened upon me, until I ended with the foregoing words.

Then he came forward with a smile, extending his hand.

"Forgive me," he said, "the strength of the language I used, but, really, I am surprised I did so well; for heretofore, I think, all language would have failed me in striving to speak of the blackness of that man's guilt, — of a wrong that, you must know, has been the greatest misfortune and grief of my life."

We sat together in silence for a moment or two, when he looked absently at me, and said, as though to himself: —

"She is actually here, then? No wonder Swallow's face seemed so familiar."

I was not prepared to talk to him of Petrice, and I arose to go; but, pausing irresolutely, asked him: —

"Can I bear a message to Mrs. Corliss — as she chooses to be known?"

He blushed like a girl.

"Why not carry the message myself?"

"Certainly," said I; "why not?"

He threw himself back in his chair, returning my smile with a merry laugh, and the blush deepened until his fair skin behind the white mustache looked truly blood-red.

"To-day?"

"Of course," I said; "why not?"

Again, with a bellow, the subterranean monster burst into being, and before it could die another death, and sink back into its grave, we were halfway through the woods.

CHAPTER XXI.

Woe unto every slanderer and backbiter: who heapeth up riches, and prepareth the same for the time to come! He thinketh that his riches will render him immortal. By no means. He shall surely be cast into al Hotama.—*Al Koran*, chap. civ.

UNTIL we were close upon the cottage, I had barely uttered a dozen words during our walk from Fifteen's, being quite content to hear him talk, which he did with unusual vivacity, telling me, in a charming way, of his quiet life in the woods. But when we came within sight of the small, white house, and I pointed to it, saying, "This is it," he became silent, and fastened his gaze upon the ground. So, seeing how nervous he was, I chatted to him of the place, and told him of the well, until we reached the porch. No one was in view, and I had looked in vain for a face at one of the windows; but the front doors were flung back, and I heard voices within, and then, as we stepped forward, she suddenly appeared before us, her face all blanched. Yet, in the instant that she halted

there at the door, the blood streamed back, mantling her neck and cheeks, and she held out her hand, uttering no word of welcome, but giving it beautifully and cordially, with smiles.

I did not look at him. I knew he held his hat in one hand, and was bending with low-spoken words over the other, which grasped her own. I did not look at him but at Petrice, who had stolen like a ghost from the little parlor into the hall, and, with hands joined tightly before her, was gazing intently at her mother and the Professor. Even her pretty lips were half-bloodless, and there was on them a feeble smile, expressive of I know not what, but it told me she knew all. As I watched her, there was a movement in the parlor, and, darting a swift glance in that direction, she started forward; the smile was replaced by a look of scorn, and she moved hurriedly towards her mother.

"Ah, Swallow!" said the Professor, looking into her white face with surprise. He stepped aside to let her come upon the porch, and I had advanced to greet her, when, following her own and the sudden gaze of Mrs. Brace, I looked into the hallway, and, to my astonishment, beheld

Schlau, with his hand on the arm of Joyce. The latter's eyes were brilliant, his face flushed, and he was leering boldly at Petrice.

"Hello, Ogden!" he said, transferring his attention to me. "It's no wonder you haven't strictly devoted your time to business. I don't blame you. If this lady's as wise as I think she is, we'll make a team hereafter."

It was evident Tickly-Bender had not enumerated all the drinks that Joyce had imbibed. I turned a questioning look upon Mrs. Brace.

"Mr. Ogden," she said, in trembling, indignant tones, "I must call on you for protection against this man, your partner. He has entered my home to-day, and deliberately insulted my daughter and myself. He came to intimidate me by threats of publishing my identity, and what he chose to term my 'spicy history,' unless I agreed to give him back the money which he claims he lost through my agent at the oil-exchange. I ordered him, repeatedly, to leave the house, and he refused to go. I called Petrice, and in her presence told him it was impossible for him to blackmail me, or to injure with his wicked falsehoods my honor in the eyes of my child. He then insulted us both, and I cannot

say how brutal he would have been had Mr. Burns not come to check him."

He leaned quietly against the door-case, resting his sinister smile upon her, while she accused him. My blood boiled within me, and I had a longing to clutch his white, lying throat with my fingers. But at this juncture, before I could speak out, a foot shuffled on the porch at the opposite side of the door, and the Professor, who until now had kept back silent and still, unexpectedly stood forward.

Joyce slowly brought his eyes to bear upon the handsome face, and then the sneering smile suddenly faded away, his thin lips parted, and he grew erect and rigid in the doorway.

It was fully a minute before the Professor, confronting him like an apparition, broke silence, in a low, repressed voice.

"So you are not satisfied yet? You must blackmail this woman, whose pure name you dared try to soil, whose happiness you blighted, by means too dastardly for most criminals, but very easy to a lying and perjured wretch like you. It is difficult for me to speak to you in temperate language. If I followed a righteous impulse within me, I would dash both fists into your face."

His voice had grown vehement, and he was too much a gentleman not to pause and curb it before us. Joyce had retreated a pace or two in the hall, his hands clenched in an attitude of defence, and a sobering expression of fright on his face.

"Mr. Ogden," continued the Professor, "I told you to-day that a 'whelp' had been sent to fawn upon and then bite me. This is he. A cur who insinuated himself into my confidence, fairly licking my hand to do it, and then embittered my life. For, madam, I will tell you, in this rascal's presence, that it was he, acting for his more culpable chief, who filled my mind with a false impression of your misery; represented himself as coming to me from you the almost daily bearer of fictitious messages; who persuaded me it was your wish that I should not see you face to face, but communicate with you only through him; who bore me forged letters purporting to come from yourself, and carried back my replies to your husband and his black-hearted lawyer, whose villanous cunning effected all your shameful suffering, the discovery of which and of these facts drove me, in very sorrow, from duty and society to the woods. You knew more of this

than I did; you knew if your husband was a scoundrel or a dupe. Until to-day, I was in doubt if this wretch had not made miserable another life besides our own. But I thank God for this chance to brand him before you as a liar and a knave, whose soul is guiltier with this crime alone than though he had murderously stained his hands with human blood."

Clearly, Joyce was quite sober now. He listened to these fierce, burning words with downcast eyes, and his body quivered as if in a chill. He shot a restless glance from under his hat, as the Professor ceased speaking, and then strode hastily past us, and descended the steps to the ground.

There he turned and drew a long breath, and slowly swept us all with an insolent stare. "Really, Professor," he said, "you are so adept in the use of expletives that I cannot hope to answer you extempore. But don't you think it a fair retort — candidly, now, doesn't your common-sense perceive that it is a sound and forcible reply of mine that I can simply stand here and point the finger of inquiry at the charming *tableau vivant* you all present there on the porch? I mean that it certainly does

look as though the divorce stood on solid grounds; that there was actually some foundation for the unpleasant rumor which coupled your name with the puzzling one of Mrs. Corliss, or Cone, or Brace — seeing that, after many days, I find you so happily united again. As for my erratic or erotic partner, perhaps Miss Petrice — "

"Schlau!" cried she, starting forward, "I order you, in my mother's name, to fling that blackguard from the premises!"

With a bound Schlau was at his side, and had grasped Joyce by the shoulder.

"Come," he said, firmly, "go with me."

Joyce was pallid with rage and shame.

"Let go of me, you fool!" he muttered, hoarsely.

"Not until you leave the place."

There was a brief scuffle, ending, as it must, in Schlau gathering Joyce into his powerful arms. He quickly twisted and seized his wrists behind his back; and then, holding him thus with one strong hand, he thrust him forward, and they disappeared around the corner of the house.

When I turned about, Mrs. Brace was sobbing upon Petrice's breast, and I knew it was

because of Joyce's last cowardly sneer. It was true they were come together again, and I could understand how keenly her sensitive nature, and his, too, would feel the sting of those cruel words.

"Mrs. Brace," said he, gravely and tenderly, "I hope it is needless for me to assure both you and your daughter that you will always have my profoundest sympathy — that I will always be ready to render you any service I can. And some day I trust you will accord me the privilege of making clearer to you the unhappy part I have played in the tragedy of your domestic life."

We left the place together, — both of us, I am sure, secretly happier than we had entered it.

Among the rocks we met Schlau and Major Dibbs. The latter stood erect, with his hands in his pockets, and an unusual breadth of smile on his face.

"I am just hearing the mournful story, gentlemen," he said. "Rely upon me: it shall not creep into the *Spouter*."

The Professor turned and approached him.

"I will certainly expect, Major, that your regard for the feelings of Mrs. Corliss" —

"As I said," interrupted the Major, "it shall not creep into the *Spouter*. Have no fear, sir."

The sun had set when I left the Professor, and the night was very dark when I climbed the Hat. As I drew near the mouth of the Pit, some one issued from one of the shanties, and walked into the gas-light. It was Bob, and I whistled to him. He halted, and awaited me.

"Where is Mr. Selden?" I inquired.

"He's down in the Pit, with Mr. Paxson."

"Tell him I wish to see him at once — here, by the pipes."

He returned in a few minutes to tell me: —

"Mr. Selden says he hasn't got the time. If you want to see him, he says, come down in the Pit."

I made no reply, but entered my cabin. I had sent for him to make this overture; — that, since it was no longer possible for us to continue together in business, I would gladly give him all my interest in the Devil's Hat for a release from our partnership. But I was now done with him. I would take other steps to secure the same end.

My future was very uncertain; but I still had the old longing to travel abroad, and was now in

a position to do so indefinitely. The Professor had said nothing of his plans to me, but I was sure, from his manner, that the day's discovery would produce a change in his living. He asked me to pass the time with him at Fifteen's until I had decided what to do; and this much I was fully determined upon — I was done forever with petroleum, with Joyce, and the Devil's Hat. What else could keep me here — what hope — you certainly must know.

I sat there looking out at the circle of gas-jets, and musing upon this hope; enjoying conceits of fancy — chiefly one, that I would indeed go abroad, but not alone — that are now such hateful memories I cannot bear to dwell upon them.

And the clang of the big church-bell at Sandhole, softened by distance, came to my ears as a faint, dolorous toll.

CHAPTER XXII.

Loves that are lost ere they come to birth,
Weeds of the wave, without fruit upon earth,
I lose what I long for, save what I can,
My love, my love, and no love for me!

— *Swinburne.*

THERE was only twilight, and thick mists hung over the Devil's Hat when I started to leave it in the morning. I had arisen so early in order to catch the first train for Oil City, and I thought myself surely the only one awake, save the driller, but, as I passed the derrick of the new well, Joyce appeared in the doorway and bade me good-morning. I did not wish to be rude with him, but I could not return the salutation, meaningless though it might be; so I simply inclined my head, and passed on towards the road.

"Ogden!" he called.

"Well?" said I, facing about.

"It will interest you to know," he said, approaching me as he spoke, "that we may strike oil within forty-eight hours."

"You are wrong," I answered, coldly; "it does not interest me at all."

He dropped the careless air with which he had first addressed me, and said, in a laughing, conciliatory tone: —

"Folly, Ogden! you certainly are not going to let that ridiculous scene of yesterday persuade you to —"

"Well," said I, sternly, as he paused, "persuade me to what?"

"Why, you don't believe their charges, do you?"

"Every word, Selden. I am so convinced of your perfidy that I am ashamed of having been your associate here, and I shall not be happy until we are entirely *dis*-sociated."

He glared at me with furious hate in his eyes, and I turned my back on him; but, as I walked away, he ripped out a savage oath, and called me "fool!" The next instant I was in front of him again with clenched fist.

"Nor will I be cursed by you. I will answer your next insult with a blow."

He fell back, laughing contemptuously; but, as I followed him up, he curled his lip, and spoke to me in a sneering, reproachful tone.

"You make handsome returns for favors done you, I swear. Here, after I have put you in the

way of making yourself independent, you are glad to cast me off and sell me out, just when a misfortune makes it"—

"Come, Selden," I said, "don't make matters worse. Have you forgotten your confession to me, that I was a dunce to have taken up with your project; that you duped me; and that it was my money alone that developed the well? Have you forgotten our agreement that we were 'quits'?"

He evidently had, until I recalled it; and now, he had nothing to say.

"But do not worry," I added. "I do not intend to 'sell you out,' whatever you mean by that. I am only going to cut loose from a dishonorable connection."

He did not reply, though I waited for him to do so; and then, turning on my heel, I walked rapidly away.

The vapors were lifting from about Sandhole when I entered it, and in the east there was a growing rose-tint. In front of the "Bullwheel," several arm-chairs were left standing on the sidewalk, now covered with dew, and the ground was littered with cigar-stumps and scraps of paper. The cocks were crowing; and a man was somewhere whistling lustily; otherwise, there was no

sound or sign of life in the town. None until I came to the end of the main street, and then heard the noise of escaping steam, and that strange buzzing, muffled roar of an engine getting ready for duty. Several men were pacing about under the little shed, and one was talking to the fireman, who clambered familiarly about his engine, with a long-spouted oil-can. In a few minutes the sun was up and sweeping the mists away from the clearing; but it lingered in the woods above, like smoke.

Suddenly, the engine blew a prolonged, fiendish whistle; and, soon after, a dozen or two of men came straggling towards the shed, some completing their toilet as they ran. They had none of them a very prosperous appearance, or even a jovial expression, as at the Roughtown ball; but, then, it was early morning, a time when no business man feels called upon to be affable, much less hilarious. A small, ferret-eyed man, in seedy attire, entered the narrow car, and sat opposite to me, the seats being only large enough to accommodate one person. He introduced himself to my notice by saying that he guessed I had forgotten him — "Fox, one of the fellows that went over to Roughtown."

"No," I said; "I remember very well; though I had a poor chance to see you that night — there were so many others."

"There're not so many now," he laughed. "It's blast lucky you didn't put up a hotel; you'd 'a' had to hire guests for it."

"Oh," said I; "things are not so bad as that. Look at '450'."

"It'll go like the rest; just the same stuff." He had become quite excited in looks, and spoke in a high, shrill voice. All the passengers were now aboard, and we were slowly jolting off.

"It's the old, old story," he resumed, looking up and down the car; "just when a field is almost played out, and a man's sunk all his cash in it, a new one's struck. It'll be the same with this Fordell's. I'll give Sandhole two months yet, and this here new field about six."

"Your're liberal enough," said a man up front.

"Just about six months!" iterated Fox; "no more."

Manifestly, the prospectors had opened up new territory.

"Where is Fordell's?" I asked.

"Over the ridge, about ten mile."

"Is it a gusher?"

Fox looked up at me dumfounded.

"'A gusher!' Ain't you heard yet?" And, without awaiting my reply, he twisted himself irritably around, and gazed out of the window.

Along the main line of railroad the excitement was intense. As we steamed out of the woods into each clearing, among the derricks and shanties, men scrambled on board the train, filling the seats and thronging the aisles. They whispered, talked, and shouted to each other, and the burden of all their conversation was Fordell's. They argued, laughed, and swore, but in the best of humor; and, as each settlement along the way yielded its quota of passengers, the occupants of the train received the fresh arrivals with loud, jocular cries in allusion to the new "gusher" — How much were they "short"? Why hadn't they told their friends of the "mystery"?

At length, the train drew up in a wild, ugly place, with second-growth timber on either hand, and only a single derrick in sight, far off to the left, on rising ground. In a few minutes the cars were all nearly emptied, and the crowd of oilmen, leaping down from the road-bed into the

bushes, went streaming noisily across country towards Fordell's, trampling out a road as they went.

But not until I reached the Exchange could I form an adequate idea of the significance of the discovery of this new well. Measured by the volume of tumult it evoked from the brokers, its importance was incalculable. I forced my way with difficulty into the building, through the mass of amateur speculators, and oil-men who hung around eagerly watching the falling market. Every member of the Exchange seemed beside himself — whether from profits or losses, it was hard to tell. Only now and then, when two would come together and pause for a hurried exchange of laughing words or playful friendly blows, was it obvious who had won. On all their faces was the same keen, nervous look; some were more haggard, others more subdued; all were yelling and perspiring. And standing around the railing, or seated quiet within it, were men with anxious, attentive faces, who said almost nothing to one another, but listened in suspense to the babel and din of voices about them, or bent submissively forward to catch a confidential word from the lips of their broker.

Bedford came at last, like a rocket, and I hastily told him my business.

"I'll straighten out your account," he said, in his quick, jerky way, "in a day or two; fix you all right by mail. But you'll not find a bidder for the Devil's Hat. This is horrible — outrageous. The market's at 97, and still tumbling; leaves your partner high and dry, and stuffs Dibbs's pocket. He's a tremendous lucky devil. — No, sir, drop the Hat, and go to Fordell's; Sandhole's a thing of the past."

The next instant he sprang from me, waving his hand, and was swallowed up in the whirlpool.

It was about the middle of the afternoon, when I descended at the Junction from the last car of the eastern-bound train. There was a crush on the platform, and, to avoid it, I alighted on the other side, and walked around the car. I then purchased my ticket on the branch line for Sandhole, and was moving out of the station, as the main-line train rolled off, when Major Dibbs confronted me, laughing in the most friendly way imaginable.

"Delighted! delighted! delighted!" he said, in his customary exaggerated manner. "Come, let us be seated in the car, and tell sad stories."

"Were you at Oil City?" I asked, when we sat opposite each other.

"Yesterday," said he, with unusual mirth in his face; and, strange to say, it seemed real and almost uncontrollable, — "not to-day. No, I only came to the Junction, to see some friends depart for the East."

"I heard of your being in Oil City yesterday," I said, thinking that the good-luck which Bedford mentioned must be the secret cause of his glee. "I suppose you don't care a pin when Sandhole becomes a wilderness again, do you?"

He rubbed his skeleton hand down over his face, composing his features, and answered me in a natural — that is, in his habitually artificial — voice: —

"I think," he said, "I once told you that Sandhole, in my opinion, would be a permanent settlement. I believe so still. Its prolific area has by no means been defined. This Fordell's doesn't concern it at all. Even granting that it also opens up a new, rich field, what of it? There's plenty of oil for all of us. Can't Brooklyn and New York grow up together?"

"Then, you will continue to publish the *Spouter* at Sandhole?"

"Yes, sir; and always, I trust."

"If every one thought as you do, Major, I could have considerable faith in the permanency of your subscription list. But aren't you oversanguine? Mr. Fox seemed rather disconsolate early this morning."

"Mr. Fox has a number of warrants for played-out territory on his hands, that he would like to dispose of at handsome figures," said the Major, with careless humor. "He is to be pitied. No, sir; as a man who lived in this country throughout 1861, — in January, when oil was cheap at ten dollars a barrel, and in September, when it was dear at ten cents, — I am not to be scared out of my boots by Fordell's, or any other 'gusher.' Wah Ling has left us, — but, then, a laundry is a luxury we can easily dispense with. Sampson, too; he folded his tent this morning, and he was wise, — there is a fine opening for him at Fordell's. But, at best, Sampson was only a bastard institution of Sandhole's."

He chatted on, in this confident style, until our little train rattled up to its destination. Then, when we had alighted, and were walking together into the town, he resumed: —

"No, you mustn't listen to Fox, or any other

grumbler. Sandhole has a prosperous future ahead of it. Take my advice: stick to it; open a law office here; some day we may send you to the legislature — to Congress. I tell you what to do!" he said, impulsively; "erect your hotel on the Devil's Hat, after all!"

The idea was very amusing to me; it was so utterly foreign to my intention.

"Candidly, Major," I said, "I am done with the Hat, and soon, I hope, with Sandhole and petroleum, also, — forever."

I expected him to argue with me, and I think I should have enjoyed having him do so. But he did not reply, and we moved on in silence almost to the office of the *Spouter*. Then, wondering that he did not speak, I cast a furtive glance at his face. It wore again the same strange expression of genuine repressed mirth, and the veins stood out on his flushed, tight skin. I stared at him in surprise.

"Ogden," said he, once more smoothing out his features with his skeleton hand, "do as I have done; marry and settle down."

Before I could answer him, he had disappeared in the doorway of his office, leaving me startled and confused by his manner and words. There

were certain impossible suspicions that came into my head, but I dismissed them hotly; and soon fell to thinking such pleasant things that I whistled as I walked to the Hat.

I went directly to my room, and, locking myself in, passed the remainder of the afternoon, until dusk, in writing. The chief and longest thing I wrote was a formal paper, in which I made over to Joyce all my interest in the Devil's Hat. And it was not until I lay outstretched on my bed that I felt at ease. Now, at last, I was free; and I lay there smiling to think what I would do on the morrow.

. . . . .

What a mockery it is for me to recall the pleasure I had that night, building castles for my love to dwell in! For the morning came, and with it Schlau, humming a tune; and he handed me this note: —

DEAR MR. OGDEN: — I cannot leave this place — as I am about to do — without telling you how very — how *very*, VERY much your debtor I feel, for your trust in me, and kindly proofs of friendship. It is not likely we shall meet again; at least, for many years; but you must believe that gratitude towards you can never fade from my own, or the heart of Petrice.

Faithfully, your thankful friend,

ELLEN BRACE.

It confused me. I read it over many times before I could find voice to speak to Schlau.

"Where have they gone?"

"How do I know?" he laughed.

His coolness angered me. "You do know! Tell me!" I demanded, vehemently.

"See, here, Mr. Ogden," he said, "I always thought you were a gentleman. You can't speak that way to me. If I did know, do you suppose I'd tell you now?"

"Come, Schlau," said I, with forced gayety, — seeing my blunder, and trying blindly to rectify it, — "this is all nonsense. They wouldn't leave a pretty little cottage, furnished like that one, on such short notice. How could she abandon her well?"

"It isn't her well now," he answered, dryly. "The Major has bought the 'pretty little cottage,' and lives in it with his wife — the widow Gurley you met at the ball. Why, look here!" he added, "did you think a lady like Mrs. Corliss could stay around here after what that sneaking partner of yours said the other day?" and he turned away from me.

This, then, was the end. Petrice had gone from my life as quickly as she had entered it;

and it is for this that I can never forget or forgive Joyce Selden.

I do not wish to remember how bitter and hopeless I felt then; it is like pricking open a slow-healing sore; but suddenly a fear entered my heart — had the Professor gone, too? The very suspicion awakened me as from a stupor, and I hastily left the Hat.

I could not believe it possible; but, if he had not gone, so much the better — I must see him; and I went swiftly towards Fifteen's by the unfrequented path through the woods. When I came to the high ground from which I might look down upon the ruins of "Mystery No. 5," where Daisy had been saved by the scout, I turned dizzily away, and my limbs could not carry me fast enough across the open spot at the brow of the hill, where I had once stood and told my heart's secret to the birds.

But he was there, thank God! walking to and fro before his cabin. I could have hugged him in my arms when he came to meet me, over the carpet of needles, smiling cheerfully. Without a word I handed him the note. He slowly read it, and then drew from his own pocket a small folded paper, on which I found these words: —

It is not necessary that you should explain to me, as you said you wished, "the unhappy part you have played in the tragedy of my domestic life." I know you always to have been to me a true and loyal friend; and I know, moreover, that you will appreciate why it is that I leave without seeing you again. Our determination is hasty — you will understand why; but I am quite ready to go. It is Petrice's wish that we go abroad; how long we will stay, I do not know; yet I want to tell you how greatly you have my confidence and sympathy, and how I will look forward to meeting you in a happier day, that I am sure must some time come. — ELLEN BRACE.

It was not from what I said to him — for I barely said anything at all, that the Professor perceived what a blow this was to me. He spoke gayly of the occurrence, but I do not remember what he said. I know that I did not want to stay long, and that, when I left him, he grasped my hand, and said, in a clear cheerful tone: —

"It will all come right; depend upon it."

Afterwards, when I lay out in the woods, these words came back to me, and gave me great hope and pleasure. And it was long after noon when I passed by the Strid, and Soda Fountain, and regained the corduroy road.

A wagon was approaching from the direction of Sandhole, and, at a glance, I remembered it as the one in which I had first seen Petrice and

Mrs. Brace driven along by Schlau. Now also there was a woman, seated behind, but the Major was driving; and he would have driven past me, smiling benignly, and raising his high hat, had not the woman — in whom, as she leaned forward, I at once recognized the round, jolly face of the former Mrs. Gurley — reached out her jewelled hand, and tugged at his elbow, calling on him to stop.

"You remember me, Mr. Ogden, don't you?" she said, confidently, as I stepped bowing before her, — "Mrs. Gurley, you know, before I married this ingrate. Well, I want to catch him in a lie; I know it's one, and he told it to me the blessed day we were married."

She was in the best of spirits, and the Major's countenance was the picture of joy.

"He says," she continued, sceptically, "that he met you yesterday at the Junction, and came back with you to Sandhole. Is that so?"

"Yes."

The Major laughed triumphantly.

"Just wait, smarty!" she said, "till I'm done. Now, Mr. Ogden, honest truth! was he with them women when you saw him?"

"Which women?" I asked; — but I suddenly

knew what she meant, and turned eagerly towards the Major. There was that same suppressed laughter in his face, and the cause of it was now clear to me.

"Why, the widow Corliss and her daughter," she said; "wasn't he?"

I shook my head, and the Major broke forth into the first natural, hearty guffaw I had ever heard from him.

So there was fate, it seemed, in my alighting from the wrong side of the car. Why had I not hurried forward, and caught a last sweet glimpse of her, perhaps a sweet smile from her, and a word of hope?

CHAPTER XXIII.

'Tis time this heart should be unmoved,
Since others it hath ceased to move;
Yet, though I cannot be beloved,
Still let me love.

—*Byron.*

THERE is little left to tell you, but the rest will be hard writing for me, and not such easy reading, I fear, for you. I cannot finish this work too quickly for my own comfort; and yet it is very gratifying, I assure you, to feel that, although we shall never meet to know each other, still I shall have in you a sympathetic friend.

I said in the beginning that I undertook this writing in the hope that it might weed from my mind all remembrance of the only man whom I could then neither forget nor forgive. I said, also, that I nevertheless feared I should die despising him. I am now sure that I shall; for, as I ought to have known, far from banishing thoughts of him from me, these reminiscences have only quickened them and made them more angry, as the events re-enacted in my brain, and passed in description from my pen. So far, then,

as the end I had in view is concerned, my story is a flat failure. I still hate Joyce Selden with all my soul.

He approached me swinging a copy of the *Spouter*, as I walked across the Hat.

"Here are two interesting bits of news for you," he said, gayly.

"What are they?" I knew very well what they were.

"One is a notice of the marriage of the valiant Major; but the choice bit is the news of the flight of the woman Brace and her child."

His impudence was amazing.

"They have *fled* from nothing," I told him, fiercely, — "nothing but your cowardly insinuation."

"Pshaw! Ogden! be reasonable! Can't you see that this woman — ?"

"Stop!" I said, firmly; "you must not dare to utter a word against her to me."

But the thing that galled me most was that he should understand and secretly gloat over the sorrow that this event had caused me. I could not tolerate the sight of his grinning face, and could hardly wait for the time to come when I might leave him forever. But it was evident he

did not believe that I would abandon him and the Hat; he thought me at heart fully as money-loving as himself, only absorbed in a girl; and, now that she was gone, he, no doubt, expected to again assume full control of myself and money.

Very early in the morning Tim knocked at my door.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I thought, Mr. Ogden, ye'd like to know about the well."

"Is it flowing?"

"No, sir; it ain't. She's a dry-hole, sir. It's my opinion ye won't get a troughful of oil from her."

"Where is Mr. Selden?"

"He told me to tell ye he'd gone to see Tickly-Bender 'bout shootin' the Pit to-night."

The news gave me real pleasure; I knew what a sore disappointment and loss this would be to him; the vengence was very sweet.

When I entered the well-house, the walking-beam was still rising and falling. Tim held some white sand in his hand.

"There it is," he said, "the reg'lar fourth; clean as ye can get it."

"But have you drilled far enough yet?" I

asked anxiously, but for a reason contrary to the one that Tim, I know, supposed.

"Fur enough?" he said; "we'll be clean through it into the slate soon. No, sir; there ain't a drop to be got out of this one, unless by glycerine. But I'm thinkin' you'll get the 'Mystery' to gush again for ye to-night. I've knowed it to be done in less likely places. There was the Necker No. 12, drilled through to the pay sand, and nothing come of it till they shot her, an' she flowed 300 barrels the first hour, stealin' all the oil from '18' and '20' — reg'lar 'gushers.' Dibbs took yer oil from ye; mebbe ye'll coax it back to-night."

Poor old Tim! I can see him yet, standing there by the door, bronzed, and oily, and rugged, but as faithful a soul as ever lived. I was away from the Hat nearly all the afternoon. At the post-office in Sandhole I found a letter from Bedford containing a satisfactory statement of my account with him; and, after answering it, I dined at the "Bullwheel," and then really did not know what to do with myself. The one man I wished to avoid was Joyce; the one man I wished to see was the Professor, but not until I was quite ready to see him; not until I

was rid of the Devil's Hat. And before I took steps in this matter I wanted to see my way clear; I would better know how to treat with Joyce when our well had been shot.

So I walked a great deal that day — almost to Roughtown; and then, branching off, on my return, into the woods, went past the Strid on the blazed path, with which I had now grown so familiar; and, if I had followed my thoughts, I would have kept on to the burning well, but I wheeled abruptly about before I reached the ravine, and came back. It was delightful at the Strid; so there I stayed until the sun had set.

There were fresh wheel and hoof marks on the wagon-road leading up to the Hat, and at the top I espied the "Terror," drawn back among the trees. Bob, our engineer, was coming towards the Pit from the direction of the new well, carrying a bell-shaped iron weight. This, I knew, was to be dropped on the torpedo.

"Almost ready, Bob?"

"Oh, no," he said; "they just carried the stuff down. Won't be ready to lower it for a half-hour."

I watched him descend, and even walked to the

brink, hesitating whether I should follow him. But the air was cool, and I first strolled to my room for a light overcoat; and then I sat down with it on and looked out of the window at the circle of gas-jets licking the air and flaming furiously. The birds were singing the day away, and occasionally the echo of a loud laugh floated up from the Pit.

I felt wretchedly lonely — as lonely as a man may feel on a desert island. I wondered what the Professor was doing, — was he still at Fifteen's? The bare possibility of his not being there made me miserable — made me sit and wonder, in a hopeless way, what I would do if he was not.

I grew intolerably nervous; for the first time in my life, I was afraid to be alone; I would join the men in the Pit. But suddenly an explosion, so terrific that I can convey no idea of it to you in words, cast me from my chair, and fairly set the hut to dancing. Then, as I lay stunned on the floor, fragments of timber, heavy and light, filled the air, and fell rattling on the roof.

I sprang to the window, and anxiously waited to hear a shout that would reassure me; for per-

haps there had been no catastrophe — the well may only have been torpedoed. But no sound reached my ears; and then I saw, in the gas-light, a twisted mass of iron — part of the boiler — and I knew what had happened. As I ran towards the steps, a flickering light arose from the Pit, and then a feeble cry, very distinct in the still air. A great volume of dense black smoke was drifting slowly away from the Hat, and the atmosphere was rancid with the odor of oil. A glance below, and I saw that the remains of the derrick and engine-house were in flames.

The spectacle chilled my blood. The Pit was all strewn and heaped with ruins; great rocks had been dislodged and tumbled down upon the fallen and splintered derrick; the subterranean exit of the brook was choked with stones, and the water was fast flooding. As I stood on the bottom step, confused and horrified at the sight, the cry that I had heard again rang out, this time louder than before, and almost at my feet.

"Help me!"

I knew the voice, changed as it was, and then I saw his face and recognized it, though a sickening gash stretched from his temple to his chin.

When I had bound my handkerchief about the wound and lifted him to his feet, he swayed unsteadily for an instant, and then muttered, in a high, strange key: —

"I thought I was dying. Don't leave me."

"Come," I said, "pluck up courage. See if you can walk."

He stepped forward a few paces, and then came back to me.

"Don't go away," he said, faintly.

"Now, do as I tell you," I insisted, leading him up the flight of steps. "You must not talk. Go in out of the air at once, and cover yourself in bed. I must look for the rest."

"It's no use," he cried, clinging to my arm, and pleading like a child. "Don't leave me. Suppose I die! I tell you, I'm the only one left. I was just coming from the Pit; all the others were with Tickly-Bender in the well-house, and are blown to pieces. Come!"

"Selden," I told him, sternly, "will you always be a selfish coward, even when death stares you in the face? Your life has been miraculously spared you — God knows why! Don't dare detain me any longer. Can't you see, if there is one poor fellow left wounded like yourself, he

will soon be burned to ashes unless I can save him?"

No, he could not see it, but sobbed and moaned out a complaint against my deserting him, until, vexed beyond endurance, I shook off his clutch, and sprang away from him.

But he was right. All except himself had certainly perished. Poor Tickly-Bender was no longer the only surviving 'shiner of the original thirteen. I will not tell you what horrors I saw. Of Tim and Tickly-Bender and the rest I saw nothing but such nameless reminders as well-nigh palsied my heart to gaze at; yet I found Bob's cold body, half steeped in the rising water, blackened, partly dismembered, all terrible to look upon, and I bore it tenderly to the mouth of the Pit. Left to himself, Joyce had done as I bade him, and crawled into bed. There I found him, impotently raving; cursing in a weak voice the God and the people he had sinned against.

Soon a few stragglers, who suspected the real meaning of the frightful explosion, came from Sandhole; among them, Major Dibbs. His conduct surprised me. When I pointed to Bob's mangled corpse, and told him of Joyce's condi-

tion, the complacent smile on his face gave way to a serious expression. He besought me to lie down.

"Your nerves are unstrung," he said. "I will attend to your partner." And he did; returning, to my wonder, good for evil; improvising a litter, and directing four of the strongest men to bear Joyce on it to the "Bullwheel" hotel and summon a physician; while the man he was befriending called him "coward" and cursed him.

A great crowd of men and women had meanwhile appeared, and they swarmed into the Pit, and stood around the blazing ruins, eagerly asking for details of the disaster. Presently I stole away from the Major's side, and walked rapidly through the darkness to the town. The people were all leaving it for the Hat, and I made my way unnoticed to the "Bullwheel." There they told me that Joyce had received medical treatment and was sound asleep. But the night was very long to me. I heard the clock strike off the hours until it was almost dawn, and the cocks were crowing.

When I awoke, a copy of the *Spouter* was lying on the floor, where it had been thrown

from the transom. The heavy black head-lines stared me in the face: —

A DEVIL'S HAT INDEED.

GLYCERINE BLOWS THE SOULS OUT OF SIX MEN.

TICKLY-BENDER, THE MOONLIGHTER, TORPEDOES HIMSELF.

THE CAUSE OF THE DISASTER A MYSTERY.

DOUBTLESS "SOMETHING DROPPED" FROM THE DERRICK, — etc.

I had not the heart to read the Major's report.

While I dressed, the physician came to tell me that Joyce's wound would soon heal; it had no doubt been made in the fall when he was cast to the ground by the shock of the explosion. He might me able to go out in a week or two; but, above all, he should not talk to fret the lesion of his lips. "He wanted to know," concluded the physician, "if he could ever whistle again, and I told him no, unless he kept a close mouth for a fortnight."

And all that day I watched them toiling in the Pit, among the charred ruins, half-submerged; and the sickening, ghastly things that they

gleaned we gave a hurried and common burial. Towards dusk, I drew forth the paper in which I had assigned to Joyce all my property in the Devil's Hat, and with it I entered his room. He was sitting up in bed, the little of his face that was not concealed by bandages showing almost as white as the linen.

"You must not speak," I said, coldly. "I am here to see you for the last time. You knew, of course, before this fearful accident occurred, that it would be utterly impossible for us to maintain a business relationship any longer. I have no desire to be exacting now. I simply want nothing more to do with you or the Devil's Hat. Here is a writing in which I legally renounce all my interest in it. Good-by — and I tell you plainly, Joyce, I wish it to be forever."

Up to this instant, the shocking disaster at the Hat had entirely possessed my mind; but, as you well know, large calamities like this, which only affect our nerves and do not sever a heart-string, are the quickest to depart our memories. Especially so was this in my case. I was heart-sick before the catastrophe, and heart-sick still; and now, in the gathering darkness, I hurried on to the physician at Fifteen's.

We sat outside the cabin, in the odor of the pines, until the moon hung straight above us, and shed her spectral light, like a shroud, upon the tops of the trees. The well, ever renascent, roared and spouted its column of white water, with the crest of flame, up into the moonbeams, and then, when we had talked of the horror at the Hat, I finally told him how wildly I loved Petrice; that I knew Petrice loved him, and not me; I told him frankly how I knew it; I told him all that I have told you, and I pleaded so earnestly that at last he placed his hand in mine, and said: —

"I will go. I hope there is happiness in store for both of us."

I was so wild to go, that, from sheer joy of the prospect, I could not sleep until the monster's cap of fire, that had shone brilliantly under the moon and stars, paled into a lurid flash in the gray light of the dawn.

So we came abroad; and I have followed a will-o'-the-wisp. Here, in this dreamy Dutch town of Delft, I have written what you have read, scarcely noting the days as they passed by. The Professor studies and writes, and together

we walk out through the faultlessly clean streets, over the graceful little brick-arched bridges guarded by white railings, where we like to stand and look at the soft shadows of the beautiful lime-trees lying on the tranquil water.

To-day, for the first time in many weeks, because I had completed this work, I tried to interest myself in sight-seeing. We went to the Nieuwe Kerk, to see the great monument to William of Orange; but I cannot recall its appearance, save the figure of the faithful dog, which awoke such dismal reflections in me that I stared at the tomb of Grotius until the Professor had finished his inspection.

"There is a fine monument to Admiral Tromp in the Oude Kerk," said he, cheerily; "wouldn't you like to see it?"

"No, not to-day," I said; "let us walk."

So we followed the canal, under that wonderful arcade of limes, until we came to a small embowered inn. There we sat a long time in silence. The day was perfect. We could look through the long avenue, to where it ended in a gleam of light. Pretty summer-houses were all around us — notably one, all white like a temple

of snow, with fluted columns, pitched in the midst of the richest greens, and just below it was a picturesque stone bridge, flanked by a large, lazy windmill.

"Are you tired of Holland?" asked the Professor, suddenly.

"No, not tired of Holland; I am tired of life."

"Nonsense! You have no right to talk that way. You are just beginning to live. You need something to occupy your mind."

"Haven't I had that something? Last night I finished my story. You believed it would be a pleasant occupation; you thought, and I hoped, that there would be a happy ending for it."

He did not answer me for some minutes.

"And so there may be," he said, at length. "Don't despond. Don't bring it to a close. Wait! I, too, am waiting."

But the days go by, and I have nothing more to tell you.

A POSTSCRIPT.

ST. HELIER'S, JERSEY.
La patience est l'art d'espérer.
— *French Maxim.*

SOMEWHERE, I once read these lines: —

"What name doth best fit sorrow
In young despair? 'To-morrow.'"

When I had written the last page of the story you have read, I bound the manuscript together, and flung it into my trunk. That was more than a year ago, and, as the months passed, and I still waited in vain for the chance to write a happy ending, many times I drew it forth, and read its chapters, and, in despair, determined to burn it. But the Professor reproved me with a look, and still said "Wait."

And I am glad I heeded him; for now I have taken out the musty sheets, and read them again with the keenest delight; I have erased whole paragraphs and written them anew; I have sought in the books for apt quotations as chapter-headings; in fine, I fancy, in my present happi-

ness, I have tried to rub out from the record most marks of my past grief, and so have, doubtless, spoiled the portrait of myself as a disconsolate lover. The picture now is hardly accurate; but, at best, it was very much overdrawn, since I wrote it with a heart surcharged with sentiment.

I strongly suspect the Professor had a clew, for, otherwise, his suggestion to come here was unaccountably sudden. We were then at Caen, and I had grown more resigned, finding contentment in reading; but when he made the motion we ran to Granville and took the boat.

Then there was a week of such pure enjoyment of nature as I had not had for years. We roamed the shady lanes of this lovely little island; lay high up on the grass of the cliffs; and gazed for hours out upon the gray sea, the jagged rocks below, and the still blue water of the bays.

One day I went alone through the parish of Trinité to Bouley Bay. I was sorry I had gone, for the indolent air, the cloudless sky, the tiny white sails far down and out on the waveless water, and the slow walk home in the shadows of the silent green lanes, filled me with an exquisite pain. But he met me at the bridge, and gave me a perfumed note. I opened it in listless

surprise, and read what fairly took my breath away: —

DEAR MR. OGDEN, — Petrice and myself will expect you to call upon us this evening with Professor Talcott.

ELLEN BRACE.

At last! I said nothing, because I couldn't even look him in the face.

So we met again. She was radiant that night. I could not take my eyes away from her, she was so beautiful to look at. And the confidence between them; her pretty protecting air towards her mother, their smiling glances at each other, full of tender love and trust — how it all relieved me of the old dread.

Then she told me, in a sweet, confiding way, of much of their life since last I saw them. They had been in Jersey, boarding at this "Grange," for three whole "delightful" months. Heavens! I longed to tell her how tedious those months had been to me. Presently, in a pause, her mother said: —

"Petrice, it must interest Mr. Ogden to hear of his partner and the Major. I have been telling the Professor."

"Certainly," she said; "I had forgotten. It

seems, Mr. Ogden, that when Sandhole lately became quite defunct, Mr. Selden abandoned the Devil's Hat and joined Major Dibbs in some oil enterprise at a new settlement — Fordell's, I think it is. At any rate, the enterprise failed because Mr. Selden embezzled the funds. He is now 'languishing in jail,' as the Major states in the *Spouter*."

"Is it possible?" I said. "How did you hear of it?"

She flashed an arch smile at her mother.

"Schlau wrote us," she said.

Sly Burns, indeed. Had he written them also of our departure?

But poor Selden! After all, you see, the end I had in view for this work has not been defeated. I now can, and I do forget and forgive him.

That night, as I was leaving the Professor, he placed his hand upon my shoulder, and said: —

"Isn't it well, my dear boy, to sit 'on a monument, smiling at grief'? Sooner or later, retribution overtakes the guilty. See how it has been with Cone."

He was trying, I saw, to speak in an easy, matter-of-fact tone.

"Why, how *has* it been with Cone?"

"He's dead," he said, backing into his room.

Then began these halcyon days — days that I hope may never end. I think there is not a by-way on this island that we have not visited; we have even crossed to Guernsey, where Petrice sketched the jumbled rocks at Cobo Bay, and the watch-tower on the bluff from the end of the charming "water-lane." A month went by, two swift, sweet months, and I was content to be her daily companion, and had not yet thought of telling her that I loved her. I wanted her to learn this for herself, and I saw clearly that she was learning it.

One afternoon we were alone, out on the ramparts of the Château Mont Orgueil. She was sketching the ivy-covered belfry, and for a long time I had stood behind her, looking beyond the massive walls of the castle, out upon the matchless scope of land and sea, of green fields, "bright breakers," and "sounding rocks." It is this that makes the Isle of Jersey a region of perpetual delight. You are up so high in the pure air, and have both the feeling of the farm and the seashore so strong upon you.

At length I turned aside to glance at her growing sketch.

"By the way," said I, as the thought suddenly entered my head, "you never showed me that sketch-book that I caused you to drop in the water at the 'Strid.' You said it was your *magnum opus*."

"Did I?" She laughed.

"Yes; and I think, since I saved it from a watery grave, that I deserve to have a peep at it."

"Perhaps you do; but it is out of the question."

"Was it in it that you drew the Professor's portrait?"

"Yes." I watched her face intently, but it underwent no change. There was not a waver in her smile; not a sign of unsteadiness in the rapid, graceful strokes of her pencil.

"Can't I see it some day?"

"I told you it was impossible. I have burned it."

Unimportant as it may seem to you, this was a delightful bit of news to me; and I strolled whistling away to the wall, on which I stood idly gazing at the great shadow cast by the castle on the long, green slope, until she came to me, carrying her folded chair, and said: —

"I have finished it. Now I want you to escort me up that hill. The map shows another old Druid monument somewhere on top, and it may be worth a visit."

So we left the château and climbed the hill, and soon reached a place in the country road where a path ran off from a gap in the hedge through a field of rank clover. The altar was there, and we made our way to it through a tangle of briar bushes.

Petrice was enraptured.

"Isn't it lovely!" she cried. "Why, I can almost stand under it! Just think of the centuries that have gone by since the priests were in here performing their bloody rites, and —"

"It is much larger than the 'Strid,'" I interposed, calmly; "but not near so interesting to me. They sacrificed life on this stone; do you know what I sacrificed when I caught you in my arms at the Strid?"

"Mr. Ogden," she said, coming forth with heightened color, "this is no place to speak of such things. I really don't see," she added, smilingly, "how you can act with levity in such a sacred presence!"

"But is there nothing in the remembrance

of your life over there to give you pleasure? Think of the burning well, the soft needle-carpet of the pines, the shady walk you had along the corduroy road, say to the Soda Fountain, or the Strid."

"Always the Strid!" she said; "will you never have done naming it?"

"But, surely," I persisted, "you must admit there was very much of the picturesque about you there; the 'moonshiner,' and the 'wildcatter' — even the gaunt derricks in the moonlight, and the odor of petroleum."

"Why," she interrupted, laughing, "you have a sharper eye for the picturesque than I ever thought you had! Now, what a pity it is you were only a lawyer or a 'wildcatter,' and not an artist, that you might have sketched those things."

"I have sketched them, roughly, — in words," I said, bearing in mind the melancholy manuscript that lay in the bottom of my trunk.

She looked at me curiously, and then I told her that I had written, for diversion, an account of my life at the Devil's Hat.

"How interesting!" she said; "am I in it?"

"You are in it very much, indeed. Would you

like to see yourself as others see you? Would you like me to read you a chapter or two of my story, some day?"

"Certainly I would. Make it to-morrow; we will go to the Hermitage."

Thus it came about. That night I laid the manuscript before me, and tremblingly selected four chapters — six, eight, thirteen, and fifteen. These I would read to her.

She had never looked so sweet in my eyes as she did that afternoon. The day seemed made for us two. The atmosphere was of that kind that only Claude could paint; what Ruskin calls the "realization of actual sunshine in misty air." We walked out on the narrow wall at ebb-tide, towards Fort Elizabeth, and the briny wind, sweeping lazily over the sands and stranded sea-weed, drew a deep pink to her cheeks, and loosened a few locks of her abundant, beautiful hair. We crossed the beach beneath the ramparts of the ancient castle, and ascended the steep, rude steps to the Hermitage. Here I made a seat for her upon the lofty rock, and then, with a few stammering preliminary words, read from chapter six my account of our first meeting at the Strid.

She laughed so merrily at it, and showed such genuine enjoyment, that I then rendered, with more courage and spirit, the whole of chapter eight — descriptive of our next encounter, at the burning tanks. But there is much in this, as you may remember, that would be painful for her to hear, especially the last words; and when I looked into her face it had grown so sad that I hastily cast aside the other chapter, and abruptly began the reading of number fifteen.

As I progressed in it, my voice broke, and I had difficulty in seeing the lines. More than once I paused in the middle of a sentence, to gather breath, quite angry at myself. Altogether, it was a most wretched performance. My auditor sat silent as a statue; but I did not dare to look at her until I ended these lines, in a tremulous and passionate tone: —

"I turned, laughing gayly at the odd conceit, and, looking up at them, where in confused ranks they fluttered, chattering, on the edge of the woods, I told them softly but with a wild impulse to shout the words to the fleeing air, that it might carry the news around the world: —

"*I love Petrice! — I love Petrice!*" . . .

Then I looked into her face, all wild to know what fate there was in store for me.

She was bending forward, her eyes wet with tears.

"You did! — you did! And do you now?"

I answered her full upon her sweet, red lips.

. . . . .

> "Like the swell of some sweet tune,
> Morning rises into noon,
> May glides onward into June."

Since then, the early summer-time has come and gone. My manuscript, as I have told you, has been revised and polished. Nor have I been the only one who has tampered with it. It has been read aloud by all of us, and countless suggestions made, and not a few corrections. And, to warrant such a proceeding, you can readily divine what has happened between the Professor and Mrs. Brace. We are all agreed that, with a change of names, it must be published — even at our own expense — and called *The Devil's Hat.*

Finally, as I would bring it to a close, Petrice comes this night to me, and asks a favor.

"Let me write the last paragraph," she says. "I have a lovely verse to end it with."

"But, really, my love," I remonstrated, "if

we patch it up in this way, it will not be fit to read. I shall have to purchase the whole edition."

"Hear him!" she cries. "He is grown so pleased with his work that we shall have him presently writing a sequel to it. 'Patch' it, indeed! I mean to adorn it. Besides, it is fitting that I should finish it; your story ends with me."

Of course she is right, and will have her way. So I bid you farewell, and pass my dripping pen to Petrice.

Don't think me silly. It is only a word I have to say. I am very, very happy! — happier, I think, than he; and all I want to write was what the King of France said: —

> *"All yet seems well; and if it end so meet,*
> *The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet."*

PETRICE OGDEN.

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